



CAMBRIDGE CLASSICAL STUDIES

*Creative Lives in
Classical Antiquity*

Poets, Artists and Biography

EDITED BY RICHARD FLETCHER
AND JOHANNA HANINK

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CREATIVE LIVES IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Poets, Artists and Biography

What happened when creative biographers took on especially creative subjects (poets, artists and others) in Greek and Roman antiquity? *Creative Lives* examines how the biographical traditions of ancient poets and artists parallel the creative processes of biographers themselves, both within antiquity and beyond. Each chapter explores a range of biographical material that highlights the complexity of how readers and viewers imagine the lives of ancient creator-figures. Work in the last decades has emphasized the likely fictionality of nearly all of the ancient evidence about lives of poets, as well as of other artists and intellectuals; this book now sets out to show what we might nevertheless still *do* with the rich surviving testimony for ‘creative lives’ – and the evidence that those traditions still shape how we narrate modern lives, too.

RICHARD FLETCHER is Associate Professor of Classics at The Ohio State University. He specializes in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy and the dynamic between classics and contemporary art. He is the author of *Apuleius’ Platonism: The Impersonation of Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2014) and is co-editor (with Wilson Shearin) of *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Philosophy*.

JOHANNA HANINK is Associate Professor of Classics at Brown University. She has published widely on ancient traditions about the Athenian tragedians, which also feature in her monograph *Lycurgan Athens and the Making of Classical Tragedy* (Cambridge, 2014).

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RICHARD FLETCHER

Ohio State University

JOHANNA HANINK

Brown University



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CONTRIBUTORS

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BARBARA GRAZIOSI, Professor of Classics, Durham University.

CONSTANZE GÜTHENKE, Associate Professor of Greek Literature, Oxford University, and E.P. Warren Praelector, Corpus Christi College.

JOHANNA HANINK, Associate Professor of Classics, Brown University.

JOHN HENDERSON, Emeritus Professor of Classics, University of Cambridge, and Life Fellow of King's College.

ANDREW LAIRD, John Rowe Workman Distinguished Professor of Classics and Humanities and Professor of Hispanic Studies, Brown University.

KURT LAMPE, Senior Lecturer in Classics, University of Bristol.

MARY LEFKOWITZ, Professor Emerita of Classical Studies, Wellesley College.

MIRIAM LEONARD, Professor of Greek Literature and its Reception, University College, London.

PAULINE A. LEVEN, Associate Professor of Classics, Yale University.

Contributors

POLLY LOW, Senior Lecturer in Ancient History, University of Manchester.

VERITY PLATT, Associate Professor of Classics and History of Art, Cornell University.

ANNA UHLIG, Assistant Professor of Classics, University of California, Davis.

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PART I

OPENING REMARKS

CHAPTER I

ORIENTATION: WHAT WE MEAN BY 'CREATIVE LIVES'

JOHANNA HANINK AND RICHARD FLETCHER

In Tom Stoppard's 1997 play *The Invention of Love*, the character of Oscar Wilde offers A.E. Housman this reflection on the power and primacy of biographical fiction:

Art cannot be subordinate to its subject, otherwise it is not art but biography, and biography is the mesh through which our real life escapes. I was said to have walked down Piccadilly with a lily in my hand. There was no need. To do it is nothing, to be said to have done it is everything. It is the truth about me.¹

In reimagining Housman, Wilde and their interactions, *The Invention of Love* creates and participates in the very sort of potent biographical fiction upon which 'Wilde' here reflects. This is a brand of fiction that has been in currency since antiquity: like other creative spirits, poets have always inspired their audiences to tell stories about them. But they have also long been prone to provoking especially 'creative' forms of biography – biography that takes bold and fantastical license with a life and so transforms that life into an artistic object in its own right. This volume, rather than attempt to reconstruct the 'real' lives of any ancient poets, artists or creators, takes as its subject precisely the mesh of fictional biography as described by, and exemplified through, Stoppard's Wilde. Though the barest facts about the lives of ancient artists and intellectuals may have irrevocably slipped from our grasp, each of the contributions here begins from the shared premise that fictional biographies are often themselves finely wrought, and worthy of examination as telling receptions of creative work. Our case studies here thus aim to shed light upon how, even from its earliest days, the act of producing biography

about creative individuals often constituted a self-consciously creative act in itself.²

In recent years the various fields of literary studies have seen an explosion of general interest in the study of biography and 'life writing' (a more comprehensive term that extends to all manner of life narratives).³ The practice of biography is also thriving in literature, film and on the stage. Tony Harrison's *Fram* (2008) and Alan Bennett's *The Habit of Art* (2009) mark but two further examples of plays that engage in their own brands of 'creative' biography, taking dramatic impetus from the life-stories of people known for their accomplishments in art and ideas. *Fram* opens with a conversation held in the poets' corner of Westminster Abbey between the (dead) classicist Gilbert Murray and the (dead) actress Sybil Thorndike. In this scene and throughout the play, Murray speaks in the rhyming couplets that were the hallmark of his translations of classical drama: via a playful *reductio ad absurdum* Harrison dramatises the premise – a premise that shaped almost all ancient literary biography – that artists are 'like' the works which they create.

The Habit of Art, on the other hand, imagines a series of encounters between W.H. Auden, Benjamin Britten and the man who would one day write the biographies of both, Humphrey Carpenter. This play goes so far as to perform the very process and pitfalls of biography in reflectively interrogating (its own) efforts to reduce or explain the creator – to make art 'subordinate to its subject'. Although Bennett's play(-within-the-play) stages snapshots from the private lives of Auden and Britten, the futility of attempting to read art against or in the light of the artist's life is assessed and asserted time and again. In an early scene the character of Auden, in a radio interview with BBC Oxford, challenges the worth of any such interview at all: 'Why poets should be interviewed I can't think. A writer is not a man of action. His private life is or should be of no concern to anyone except himself, his family and his friends. The rest is impertinence. Yes?'⁴

Drama constitutes but one medium of contemporary creative biography with a classical pedigree, as plays that portrayed artists of the past also drew audiences in fifth- and

fourth-century Athens. The best known (and only fully extant) ancient example is Aristophanes’ *Frogs* (405 BC), a comedy in which the deceased tragedians Aeschylus and Euripides appear together in the setting of the Underworld. James Porter has discussed how a play such as *The Frogs* can work towards fulfilling an audience’s desire to ‘feel the presence of a classical original’ – after all, Porter continues, ‘what better *emblem* for this desire than the live reperformance, not of tragic plays, as in the case of the theatrical revivals that would contribute to the survival of classical plays, *but of the tragedians themselves?*’⁵ In antiquity this desire for the presence of the ‘original’ would also have informed the many attested fourth-century comedies that fancifully re-imagined the lives of archaic poets: Sappho may have expressed a longing for an epiphany of the goddess Aphrodite (fr. 1), but for later audiences who longed to see Sappho herself some gratification was available in ‘her’ many appearances on the stage. Today new productions continue to work towards fulfilling our own fantasies of being in the presence of artists and thinkers of the past, and at least one of these even pays explicit homage to the ancient tradition. In *The Invention of Love* the curtain rises on the recently-deceased A.E. Housman being ferried across the river Styx and so effectively retracing the journey made by the god Dionysus in an early scene of *The Frogs*.

The classical precedents for imaginative biographical drama suggest that audiences have long desired to come into contact with great creators of the past and to experience the visual fulfilment of ‘seeing’ those creative minds at work. It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that heightened general interest in the questions, problems and possibilities of biography also currently characterises the discipline of Classics. A handful of collections have lately been dedicated to a variety of aspects of ancient biography, from its earliest signs of development (Erler and Schorn 2007) to its general evolution in antiquity (Hägg 2012) and from the parameters of the biographical genre (McGing and Mossman 2006) to the narrative importance of fictionality in Greek biography from antiquity to the present day (Borghart and de Temmerman 2010). A number of

studies in the last decade or so have also focussed explicitly on the ancient traditions for the lives of the poets: Clay (2004) gathered the evidence for ancient cults of poets; Compton (2006) read the poets' lives through a mythological and ritual lens in tracing the *topos* of the persecuted and often exiled artist; and Kivilo (2010) traced the early development of biographical tradition for a number of archaic poets. Hardie and Moore's (2010) edited volume *Classical Literary Careers and Their Literary Reception* even took up for Classics (primarily for Latin studies) the standard of 'career criticism', a branch of biographical studies that examines how artists and authors have self-consciously shaped their own creative careers, often-times along the templates provided by the careers of admired predecessors.⁶

The present volume, however, concentrates on a more unturned stone of ancient biography, namely the inherently creative dimension of literary, philosophical and artistic (i.e. 'creative') biographical work. In her *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (1981; 2nd, revised edn 2012) Mary Lefkowitz demonstrated that 'virtually all the material in all the lives [of Greek poets] is fiction',⁷ with most of that material ultimately deriving from the poets' own verses, mediated in some cases by 'sources' such as Old Comedy. Nevertheless, she also recognised the importance of the biographical *process* as an object of study, allowing even in the original edition that 'The process of "recovery" of biographical information [i.e. by the poets' biographers] required imagination'.⁸ All of the essays in the present volume are united by some form of interest in the workings and results of precisely that imagination. Here, however, we do not restrict ourselves as Lefkowitz did to the ancient poetic *vitae*, i.e. the short biographies of poets that have been transmitted alongside their works. Rather, we allow as our objects of inquiry any work of any author (or artist or thinker) whose own creativity had been provoked by the imagined figure of another – that is, by the details of and traditions about another 'creative life'. Taking for granted, moreover, that most of the material in the ancient sources for the lives of poets, and of other artists and intellectuals, has

been fabricated, the contributions here set out to ask what we might nevertheless still *do* with these *corpora* of ancient sources and testimonia.

Because one of the purposes of this volume is to explore the very fictionality of creative biographical traditions, many of the chapters also draw upon Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz’s *Die Legende vom Künstler: Ein historischer Versuch* (1934), which in its (1979) English translation became *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment*. Kris and Kurz, whose work we return to later in this ‘Orientation’, identified a number of patterns in the stories about the lives of artists (the term ‘artist’ again being broadly conceived) within the Western tradition. The recurrence of ‘universals’ in the biographies of artists is a noteworthy phenomenon in its own right, but many of the contributions here also explore the unique expressions of those themes in particular biographies and traditions, which mark valuable evidence for perceptions of artists more firmly rooted in specific eras and places. Barbara Graziosi’s (2002) *Inventing Homer* confirmed that much is to be gained from serious study of the contexts and cultures that gave rise to particular biographical fictions. With regard to the Homeric tradition, Graziosi emphasised that

the fictionality and popularity of the ancient material on Homer’s life does not warrant our ‘disregard’. Precisely because they are fictional, early speculations about the author of the Homeric poems must ultimately derive from an encounter between the poems and their ancient audiences.⁹

In other words, though the biographies may preserve no factual information about any real individual ‘Homer’, they have much to tell us about the ancient audiences and readers of the Homeric poems. Biography, then, is always and necessarily an act or document of reception. With respect to the exceptionally rich tradition for Sappho, Glenn Most has remarked that ‘no part of her reception can safely be dismissed as simply false’,¹⁰ and here we take this observation to be generally true of artists and creators. Charles Martindale, too, reminds us that ‘We shall not, for example, find a “real” Sappho if by that we mean one for which there is convincing corroborating evidence from

her own time'. But, he rightly emphasises, this hardly means that we should overlook the ancient (or even the more modern) wealth of material that forms the tradition of Sappho's reception, for 'Should we give up all this richness – in exchange for little or nothing?'¹¹

The title of this volume, *Creative Lives*, therefore points to creativity on two distinct but entangled levels. In the first place, each of our contributions addresses the biographical traditions (if not 'biographies' *sensu stricto*) for individuals who were creators, or whose body of thought and even – in the case of philosophers – *modus vivendi* was particularly original. In the second place, the title also gestures to the creative aspects of biographical traditions and representations themselves. In weaving together these two threads, we seek to interrogate those ancient 'creative processes' that took as their object the lives of creative people. The word *Lives* performs an important double work for us: it signifies the creative artefacts of life writing, as well as the lives of those individuals who inspired such active and varied biographical interest. In this respect, our title maps well onto the Greek word βίος, which can mean both an individual's life and a biographical work (or *Life*, in this volume).

Volume overview

The sum of this volume's parts is not a comprehensive account of our subject, but rather an exploration of the kind of results afforded and inspired by the premises that we have outlined. Together the chapters here aim to underscore that much is to be gained – and much ancient material to be salvaged from the waste-bin – from approaching antiquity's creative lives in ways that combine awareness of fictionality with reception-based interpretations. Despite the disparity of our material the reader should nonetheless encounter a number of themes which wind through multiple contributions. These include the importance of the figures of predecessors to the forging and articulation of new literary, philosophical and artistic projects; the tendentious (re)shaping of biographical material in the interest of advancing

creative, intellectual and political agendas; and the complexity of the relationship between readers (and viewers) and imagined creator-figures.

So as to foreground the role that modern scholarship and creativity has played in shaping contemporary approaches to ancient creative lives, we have paired Constanze Güthenke’s contribution (Chapter 2, “‘Lives’ as parameter: the privileging of ancient lives as a category of research c. 1900”) with this introduction in our ‘Opening Remarks’. Güthenke’s study establishes a critical orientation for the work of the rest of the volume, in that it elucidates how scholarly discussions of ancient biography have historically pitted ‘*Wissenschaft* against *Kunst*, and the scholar (*Wissenschaftler*) against the writer (*Schriftsteller*)’. Güthenke foregrounds the implications that early scholarly debates about ancient biography have for the work that we do today, arguing that the (study of the) biography of Plato in particular had a heavy hand in demarcating and defining the very field of Classics. This choice to begin the volume with a piece that overtly tackles issues of contemporary reception is programmatic: if (as we argue) all accounts of creative lives are fundamentally acts of reception, then we and our readers ought to proceed with an awareness of how modern receptions (however ‘scholarly’) of the ancient sources have shaped (however subtly) the parameters and approaches of the contributions made here.

What follows is a two-part overview of the volume that links the respective contributions in an order out of sequence with our own Table of Contents. Each of the sections of this book contains chapters that we intend to be read against and in the light of each other, and each of those sections sets evidence for and discussions of poets’ lives against contributions centred on biographical traditions for other types of broadly ‘creative’ individuals (philosophers, artists, musicians, *et al.*). Here, however, and by way of introduction, we provide a brief overview of the early trajectory of the ancient fascination with poets’ lives. This overview is intended as a means of contextualising those contributions which take poets as their main subjects. We then offer a discussion of the chapters which take on other sorts of

creative individuals so as to emphasise the particular characteristics and challenges of the related but different traditions for philosophers, musicians, artists and others. At the end of this volume, John Henderson's *Envoi* will provide yet another synoptic organisational framework, and it is hoped that the reader will find in these different synthesised approaches to the material (as outlined by this introduction, the *envoi* and the organisation of the Table of Contents) various prompts for seeing the value of these case studies in combination.

Lives of the poets

In the modern era debates about ancient biographies gave rise and shape to the discipline of Classics (as Güthenke here discusses), and the very strictures of that discipline naturally prompt us to sift through the sources for the earliest traces of conversations about ancient literary, artistic and intellectual lives. It is tempting to imagine that, whether out of admiration or envy (or both), members of the first poets' own communities invented stories about them – such as the tales of Hesiod and Archilochus' mystical initiations into poetry – to account for their 'divine' and otherwise inexplicable talents (vestiges of those stories likely survive in the ancient accounts of creativity and poetic inspiration which Mary Lefkowitz here examines in detail). Anecdotes and other information about poets would also have travelled and been transmitted along with their poetry, only to be elaborated, exaggerated and adjusted by later audiences and performers. Although we lack direct evidence for the development of these early traditions, they surely had lasting effects on the content and shape of the narratives that do survive. As Kivilo (2010) has argued, some of the commonplaces of Greek literary biography across all periods, such as the author's exile or his peculiar death at a very old age, must have originated in tales told about the first poets.¹²

An early fascination with the figures of the lyric poets is also attested by the appearance of their portraits on pottery. The earliest surviving representation of a Greek poet is a late sixth-century black-figure piece by the 'Sappho Painter'

(c. 510–500 BC), which depicts Sappho as a solitary beautiful woman playing a *barbitos*.¹³ A generation later, the ‘Brygos Painter’ represented her in red-figure alongside her fellow Mytilenean Alcaeus, both of them holding *barbitoi* (Figure 1.1).¹⁴ The Brygos Painter’s vase marks the first example in any medium of an imagined encounter (and possibly even an agonistic one) between great poets of the past – a kind of visual predecessor of the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* and even of Aristophanes’ *Frogs*. By the same period, in the late sixth century, concerted research into the lives of poets was also apparently underway. Theagenes of Rhegium, otherwise famous for his allegorical interpretations of Homeric narratives, appears at the head of an ancient list of scholars ‘who first investigated Homer’s poetry and origins (γένος) and lifetime (καθ’ ὃν ἤκμασεν)’.¹⁵ Rhapsodes who performed the Homeric poems would also have been responsible for transmitting (and inventing) information about Homer; Isocrates, for example, would later attribute the story that Helen told Homer in a dream to compose a poem on the Trojan expedition to the ‘Homeridae’, or rhapsodes who claimed descent from Homer himself (cf. Isoc. *Helen* 10.64).¹⁶

Evidence from the second half of the fifth century begins to show us how the lives and figures of poets were inspiring new creative production across a variety of genres. Anna Uhlig here explores the complexities of Pindar’s allusions to the figure of Homer (Chapter 5, ‘A poetic possession: Pindar’s *Lives* of the poets’), highlighting the significance of those allusions for Pindar’s poetic self-fashioning. Uhlig discusses how even early poets referred to the figures and lives of poetic predecessors as they crafted their own lyric *personas*.¹⁷ From the fifth century we also have the first recorded stories about episodes in poets’ lives; these are preserved in prose works such as Ion of Chios (fragmentary) *Epidemiai* and Herodotus’ *Histories*.¹⁸ Herodotus’ historical narrative includes, for example, the marvellous tale of Arion’s rescue by the dolphin during the reign of Periander of Corinth (1.23–24), as well as the story of how the tragedian Phrynichus was fined a thousand drachmas for reminding the Athenian people of recent disasters with his



Figure 1.1 Vase attributed to the 'Brygos Painter', depicting Sappho and Alcaeus, c. 475 BC. Staatliche Antikensammlung, Munich, Germany.
Credit: Art Resource, NY.

Capture of Miletus (6.21). Anecdotes about poets recorded by the likes of Ion and Herodotus may also have eventually found their way into the later poetic *vitae*.¹⁹

Thucydides’ account of the Athenian purification of Delos (in 426/5 BC) stands as another witness to the interest that historians took in poets and especially in Homer. This narrative is of particular importance in that it serves as one of the earliest clear illustrations of deduction of biographical information from a poet’s own verses, the ‘inferential’ method that gave shape to much early literary biography. In the third book of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides claims that Homer’s description of the Ionian games on Delos in the *Hymn to Apollo* attests to the historical precedent for the festival recently established on the island by the Athenians. He highlights that a musical competition (μουσικῆς ἀγών) used to be part of the old Ionian festival, then suggests that Homer hinted at his own participation in one of those contests in these lines of the *Hymn*:

ἀλλ’ ἄγεθ’, ἰλήκοι μὲν Ἀπόλλων Ἀρτέμιδι ξύν,
χαίρετε δ’ ὑμεῖς πᾶσαι. ἐμεῖο δὲ καὶ μετόπισθε
μνήσασθ’, ὅππότε κέν τις ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων
ἐνθάδ’ ἀνείρηται ταλαπείριος ἄλλος ἐπελθών·
‘ὦ κοῦραι, τίς δ’ ὕμιν ἀνὴρ ἥδιστος αἰδῶν
ἐνθάδε πωλεῖται, καὶ τέω τέρπεσθε μάλιστα;’
ὕμεῖς δ’ εὖ μάλα πᾶσαι ὑποκρίνασθαι ἀφήμως·
‘τυφλὸς ἀνὴρ, οἴκεῖ δὲ Χίῳ ἔνι παιπαλοέσση.’

Thuc. 3.104.5; *Hom. Hymn to Apollo* 166–72

But come, propitious Apollo and Artemis, and farewell to all you maidens. Remember me later, whenever some earth-dwelling mortal who has endured much comes here and asks you: ‘O maidens, which man do you think to be the sweetest of the bards who comes here, and in whom do you most delight?’ Answer, all of you, in one voice: ‘A blind man, who dwells on rugged Chios.’

Thucydides’ biographical reading of the hymnic *sphragis* relies upon what is evidently an already well-established Homeric tradition: the poet of the *Hymn* claims to be blind and from Chios, which for Thucydides securely establishes his identity as Homer.²⁰ In this passage the process of inferential

biography unfolds before our very eyes, as Thucydides performs the deduction of information from words which he claims to be the poet's own: the hymn's verses 'prove' that Homer had been a competitor in the earlier Ionian festival.²¹

In the fifth century the poets' biographies also served as a source of inspiration for comic playwrights. The comic poets regularly depicted and caricatured other poets (including their rival comedians²²) with great poetic license, and as a result Attic comedy is one of our most informative witnesses regarding the early circulation – and creative refashioning – of 'biographical' information. Lines from Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, for example, suggest that by the last quarter of the century Hipponax's Boupalos had become an Athenian household name: in the play's *parodos*, the men's chorus encourage each other to strike the members of the women's chorus so that 'just like Boupalus' (366) they no longer have a voice. Aristophanes' contemporary Cratinus also produced a comedy called *Archilochoi*, a play whose chorus seems to have consisted of Archilochus (the chorus leader?) and his followers,²³ and an *Archilochus* is attested for the Middle Comic poet Alexis. Testimonia also survive for six comic plays titled *Sappho* alone; in the version by Diphilus (a contemporary of Menander) Archilochus and Hipponax played the role of Sappho's amorous pursuers.²⁴

Though archaic poets appeared with great regularity on the fourth-century stage, the poet who most inspired Aristophanes' own creativity in the fifth century was the tragedian Euripides, his fellow Athenian and an older contemporary.²⁵ Euripides appears as a character in three of Aristophanes' eleven surviving plays (*Acharnians*, *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Frogs*); a scholiast's note (at *Wasps* 61) also indicates that he featured among the *personae* of the lost *Proagon*. According to Aristophanes' depictions, Euripides was a head-in-the-clouds intellectual (cf. esp. *Acharnians* 395–400) whose plays catered to the tastes of the lower classes and criminals: in *The Frogs*, Pluto's slave reports Euripides had performed for a crowd of 'thieves and pickpockets and father-beaters and burglars' (the majority of the population) as soon as he had arrived in Hades

(771–8). Aeschylus, on the other hand, is portrayed in *The Frogs* as bombastic and bellicose, a cantankerous veteran of Marathon (cf. 1296–7; his participation in that battle is also highlighted in the Sicilian epitaph preserved by his *vita*²⁶). Hyperbolic though its humour may be, *The Frogs* is an important witness to the critical logic that linked poets' literary and 'personal' styles.²⁷ In a later, Hellenistic, biographical dialogue about Euripides, one of the speakers credits Aristophanes with the saying 'as are his characters, so is the poet',²⁸ and regardless of whether the *dictum* truly belonged to Aristophanes, comedies such as *Frogs* certainly would have lent credence to the attribution.

A central tenet of Lefkowitz' *The Lives of the Greek Poets* is that Old Comedy's exaggerated and fanciful depiction of the tragic poets, and especially of Euripides, would have a profound effect on the development of the biographical traditions. Chamaeleon of Heraclea, one of antiquity's first literary biographers (active in the fourth-third centuries BC), even explicitly defended comedy as one of his sources in declaring that 'the comic poets are reliable on the subject of the tragedians'.²⁹ Many of the specific debts to comedy in the tragedians' *vitae* have been traced by Lefkowitz,³⁰ who has shown how certain Aristophanic lines are likely responsible for e.g. the Euripidean *vita*'s notions that Euripides had warts on his eyes, or that Cephisophon helped him to compose his tragedies.³¹ Aristophanes' caricatures of Euripides further appear to have influenced how some later readers interpreted his poetry. One possible witness to this effect appears among the Byzantine scholia to Euripides' *Trojan Women*: after Menelaus has declared that he will kill Helen upon their return to Sparta so as to impress upon other women the need for chastity, he admits (at line 1057) that reforming women 'will be no easy task'. Taking what may be a cue from the old comic caricatures of Euripidean misogyny (cf. e.g. lines 383–432 of *Thesmophoriazusae*), the scholiast explains that Euripides wrote these words 'on account of his hatred of women'.

The figure of Euripides proved a particularly malleable one, and in this volume Johanna Hanink traces how some of the

earlier biographical anecdotes about him stand at odds with the transmitted *vitae* (Chapter 6, ‘What’s in a *Life*? Some forgotten faces of Euripides’). The fourth century BC saw the biographies of well-known poets remoulded and refashioned in a variety of creative – and sometimes polemical – ways. In Xenophon’s *Hiero*, for example, the fifth-century lyric poet Simonides is cast in the role of wise interlocutor of the dialogue’s namesake tyrant. What is more, although relatively little poetry survives from this period, we know that poets alive during it inspired complex biographical traditions of their own. The life of the renowned fourth-century dithyrambist Philoxenus gave rise to an especially rich *corpus* of biographical anecdotes, which are among the sources for ‘musical lives’ that are here explored by Pauline LeVen (Chapter 11, “‘It is Orpheus when there is singing’: the mythical fabric of musical lives’). LeVen’s contribution shows how the very flexibility of the anecdotal traditions for poets – and musicians – made for bodies of testimonia that reveal more than popular ideas about that artist. In the specific case of Philoxenus, she argues, these testimonia refract a more abstract ‘poetics’ of the musician’s life, where single biographical moments stand for commentary upon the politics and status of *mousikê* in the Greek world.

By the mid-fourth century, the lives of poets had gained popularity as the specific objects of historical and critical inquiry. In his lost work *On Poets* Aristotle seems to have combined literary-critical observations with biographical information and anecdotes,³² and in the next generation students of his would inaugurate formal literary life writing with their treatises on the lives and works of individual poets. These works, now sometimes referred to as ‘Περί’ (‘About’) literature, proliferated in the later fourth and third centuries, particularly in the context of the Peripatos (Περί-writers included Aristoxenus, Chamaeleon, Hermippus of Smyrna and Heraclides Ponticus).³³ These works typically treated single poets or even categories of poets (Hieronymus wrote an *On the Tragic Poets* and an *On the Kitharodes*, for example), and thus constitute some of the earliest predecessors of the surviving poetic *vitae*.³⁴

Research into the lives of the poets continued and indeed flourished in the context of the Alexandrian library and it is often speculated, for example, that the ‘Alexandrian editions’ prepared by scholars such as Alexander Aetolus, Lycophron and Zenodotus would have included short prefatory biographies.³⁵ This is in part suggested by the multiple citations of Alexandrian scholars as sources for information repeated within the *vitae*.³⁶ The spectres of poets from centuries past haunted the imaginations of many of these ancient scholars, who devoted long hours to reading, editing and annotating the ancient poetic works. The archaic poets in particular made appearances in a vast swathe of the new creative work that was being produced in Alexandria,³⁷ and in some cases the *personae* of earlier poets helped later authors to give shape to their own new projects and programmes. Callimachus’ first *Iambus*, for example, begins with the command ‘listen to Hipponax!’,³⁸ then proceeds in the voice of the dead Hipponax himself, who (we are told by the *Diegesis*) summons the Alexandrian *philologoi* to the Serapeion and orders them not to envy (φθονεῖν) each other.³⁹ Just as previous poets had done (and later writers would continue to do), Hellenistic poets also fashioned the lives of their creative predecessors to templates that supported their own agendas of self-presentation. The fragmentary ‘Catalogue of Loves’ (fr. 7 Powell) from Hermesianax’s lost *Leontion*, for example, is an elegiac work dedicated to the poet’s mistress which maps literary history as a series of ‘literary’ love affairs. From Orpheus and Musaeus (whose biographical traditions LeVen also discusses here), through Hesiod and Homer, to poets of the fourth century BC, Hermesianax’s catalogue tours through the romances of poets and philosophers who wandered from home to be with their beloveds.⁴⁰

In this volume Barbara Graziosi offers an account – one which ranges from the earliest depictions of Anacreon to the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* – of this universal impulse of readers to ‘self-identify’ with particular authors (Chapter 3, ‘Close encounters with the ancient poets’). She outlines what she calls ‘some of the mechanisms through which readers

establish a personal correspondence between themselves and the ancient poets', and goes on to elucidate how these imagined encounters between readers and poets would have given rise to a number of the biographical fictions that are preserved in the ancient *Lives*. Pseudo-Longinus, in the treatise *On the Sublime*, even explicitly advised that we conjure the shades of dead authors as part of our own creative processes. He enjoins the would-be author to imagine how great poets and writers of the past (such as Homer, Plato, Demosthenes and Thucydides) would themselves word his material:

Emulation (ζῆλον) will bring those great characters (πρόσωπα) before our eyes, and their shining presence will lead our thoughts to the ideal standards of perfection. Still more will this be so, if we also try to imagine to ourselves: 'How would Homer or Demosthenes, had either been present, have listened to this passage of mine? How would that passage have affected them?' Great indeed is the ordeal (τὸ ἀγώνισμα), if we suppose such a jury and audience (θέατρον) as this to listen to our own utterances and make believe that we are submitting our work to the scrutiny of such heroes (τηλικοῦτοις ἥρωσι) as witnesses and judges. (Ps.-Longinus *On the Sublime* 14.1–2, trans. Fyfe)

The spectre of the poetic predecessor also plays a leading role in the one chapter here devoted primarily to Latin poets and the Roman tradition, in which Andrew Laird examines the reception of the 'character' of Virgil in authors from later antiquity to the Renaissance. In his contribution ([Chapter 4](#), 'Recognizing Virgil') Laird investigates the (hyper-)active biographical imaginations of Virgilian scholars and other poets who drew creative inspiration from the interface between the figure of Virgil and the authorial presence which they perceived in his works. Laird, too, ties together the approaches of Lefkowitz and Graziosi in exploring both the fantasies of contributors to the Virgilian biographical tradition and the significance of those fantasies as moments of reader-reception; his chapter therefore opens the Latin inheritance to methods of inquiry into poets' lives that have tended more directly to inform the approaches of scholars working, like the majority of this volume's contributors, in the Ancient Greek tradition.

Philosophers, artists and other creative thinkers

Polly Low’s contribution (Chapter 7, ‘Lives from stone: epigraphy and biography in Classical and Hellenistic Greece’) serves as one bridge between our discussions of poets’ lives and those chapters which are dedicated to antiquity’s ‘creative life’ traditions for other types of thinkers and creators. While Low’s chapter highlights the use of creative biographical approaches in public political discourses, she begins by drawing attention to the striking absence of biography from some of the ancient texts in which we might most have expected to find its traces, namely Greek inscriptions. Even those inscriptions that allude to specific individuals (statesmen, philosophers and poets alike) are in most cases surprisingly non-biographical documents. Yet later authors wove the ‘evidence’ of inscriptions into biographical writings so as to lend credence to the narratives (and fictions) which they recorded about their subjects; those narratives, too, mark moments of reception of creative lives. What is more, the very reluctance of inscriptions to speak ‘biographically’ renders all the more remarkable those instances in which documents go beyond praising the personal characteristics of an individual to narrating the events of his life. Low also discusses types of later (fourth-century and Hellenistic) inscriptions which might lay a valid claim to life writing. These include honorific decrees for benefactors of Athens, as well as the exceptional (and exceptionally creative) cases of two long inscriptions that record events – some of them surely fantastical – in the life of an archaic poet whose own reception history is particularly rich, Archilochus of Paros.

In pursuing both the use of epigraphic documents in biography and the forms of epigraphy that show an impulse towards biography, Low also broadens our view to include statesmen (such as Lycurgus of Athens) and philosophers (such as Zeno and Diogenes Laertius). The life and *Life* of the intellectual, and of the philosopher in particular, marks the primary theme of the contributions by Lefkowitz, Lampe and Fletcher. The philosophical life offers both a complementary

and contrastive expansion of the creative lives of the poet and artist. On the one hand, the discussion of the value of ancient biographical traditions of philosophers has been seen to parallel that of the poets, inasmuch as both poet and philosopher may be understood as writers.⁴¹ The literary production of poets and philosophers is therefore often the basis for fictional and creative biographical traditions.⁴²

Accounts of the figure of the philosopher as writer, however, mark only one way in which this set of biographical traditions has been articulated and mobilised. In confronting the ancient traditions for philosophers' lives we face not only the problematic cases of philosophers who did not write (e.g. Socrates, Carneades, Diogenes of Sinope, Pyrrho *et al.*), but also a more fundamental question of how to understand the philosopher's own 'life of the mind'. The conception of philosophy as a way of life and not as a mode of authorship lent itself to belated biographical explanations in antiquity, with perhaps the most extreme example being the case of Secundus, 'The Silent Philosopher'.⁴³ Yet, especially in cases in which the philosopher only worked 'orally', a central problem always plagues the biographer: how is it possible to characterise the life of the mind? According to the Socrates of Plato's *Republic*, the philosopher is someone who produces moderation, justice and the whole of popular virtue with recourse to the Forms (500d4–8). In some cases such production is compared with other types (such as written output); in others it is regarded as completely separate. One example of the latter approach is to be found in Martin Heidegger's 1924 lecture on Aristotle. Hannah Arendt recalls that lecture in a footnote to *The Life of the Mind*:

in the classroom [Heidegger] used to tell the biography of Aristotle. 'Aristotle', he said, 'was born, worked [spent his life thinking], and died'.⁴⁴

The immediate context for Arendt's recollection of her teacher's sententious remark is her discussion of a comment made by the philosopher and Catholic theologian, Etienne Gilson, who opens his autobiography *The Philosopher and Theology* by looking back with disdain on the request for him to write an autobiography:

A man of seventy-five should have many things to say about his past, but ... if he has lived only as a philosopher, he immediately realizes that he has no past.⁴⁵

In Bennett's *The Habit of Art* the character of W.H. Auden emphasises the privacy of the writer's private life and past, but for Gilson here the philosopher is a man without a past. Under these different rubrics, poet and philosopher might nevertheless be united by the declaration, also pronounced by 'Auden' in *The Habit of Art*, that a writer should be of no biographical interest because he is not a 'man of action'.

But why does Arendt make recourse to anecdotes about both Gilson and Heidegger? In doing so, she is giving an account of the thinking *ego*, which is 'sheer activity and therefore ageless, sexless, without qualities, and without a life story'.⁴⁶ The exemplary figures whom Arendt chooses to evoke nevertheless immediately betray her own life-story. Furthermore, the anecdote of Heidegger's Aristotle has also been cited, only to be dismissed, by more recent defenders of the fruitful dynamic between philosophy and biography. Simon Critchley describes Heidegger's comment as a portrait of philosophy and life as 'Olympian and godlike ... incapable of considering the philosopher as a creature'.⁴⁷ Instead, for Critchley (whose own approach to ancient philosophical biography is discussed here by Richard Fletcher), 'the philosopher who disregards the lives and deaths of philosophers is hostile to their and his or her own individuality, embodiment, and mortality'.⁴⁸ Arendt's conception of life writing as a public, collective discourse can be seen, then, to vie with Critchley's individualism.

A number of the pieces collected here oscillate between Critchley's and Arendt's focus on biography and the life of the mind in seeing the ancient philosopher at once as conditioning an individual 'creaturely' reception, but at the same time as a particular image of the 'collective' practice of philosophy. Mary Lefkowitz (Chapter 8, 'On bees, poets and Plato: ancient biographers' representations of the creative process') teases out the idiosyncrasies of Plato's ancient biography in the light of more general biographical tendencies in

focussing on the particular theme of inspiration. Anecdotes about Plato's early life and his move towards philosophy are here shown to have roots in traditional accounts of poetic inspiration. Lefkowitz' chapter thus provides another example of the overlap in antiquity between the biographical traditions for poets and philosophers – two related yet distinct categories of creative individuals – and (re)introduces the complex question of creativity that surfaces so forcefully in subsequent contributions. On the other hand, for Kurt Lampe ([Chapter 9](#), 'The life and philosophy of Aristippus in the Socratic epistles'), Aristippus, pupil of Socrates and founder of the hedonistic Cyrenaic school, appears to fall on the side of the *Lebenskünstler* in that his philosophy *is* his life. Lampe's focus on the so-called 'Socratic Epistles', written in the 2nd-3rd centuries CE, allows us to see how one anonymous ancient 'biographer' attempted to translate Aristippus' own various 'performances' as a philosopher into a prose first-person narrative. Here the epistolary genre, an especially popular medium for creative life writing in later Greek antiquity, presents an especially intimate angle of reception. The letter form itself demands revelations of the letter-writer's character, and this aspect of the genre becomes still more complex and intense in cases of pseudepigraphy. In unpacking the levels of Aristippus' irony in the *Epistles*, Lampe elucidates the complex reception of the philosopher's identity and begins to uncover the literary and creative life writing strategies of the anonymous epistolographer.

Lampe's focus on how the text of the Socratic Epistles engages the life of the philosopher, as well as on the significance of humour for philosophical *Lives*, is also central to Richard Fletcher's account of Diogenes Laertius' poetic accounts of philosophers' deaths ([Chapter 10](#), 'Imagination dead imagine: Diogenes Laertius' work of mourning'). Fletcher discusses the pervasive presence of Diogenes Laertius in conceptions of the dynamic between biography and philosophy, from Nietzsche to Crichtley. He highlights how Diogenes' poems on philosophers' deaths are consciously playful, but also do the important work of allegorically discussing the 'afterlife' of a philosopher's ideas in ways that might challenge,

contradict or confirm them. By writing poetry on the deaths of philosophers, Diogenes offers a collective image of philosophy as a process of thinking beyond death. That image marks his own creative response to the philosophers' lives, viewed through the lens of their deaths.

As in the case of philosophers, tales about the deaths of artists have long belonged to the set of biographical fictions that arise from the imagination of the creative figure's 'public'. In *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist*, Kris and Kurz discussed the commonplace of the artist who 'seeks death when he believes that he has failed in his work'.⁴⁹ This *topos*, they argued, reflects the conceit that artist and creation are one, sometimes to the extent that the 'lives' of each are imagined as necessarily co-terminous:

The inner life of the artist is bound up with his work; creator and his creation are irrevocably linked. It is this fact that the biographical formulas of the artist's death attempt to encompass. His sensitivity, vanity, and arrogance all assume a tragic dimension. In this formula, the special position of the artist is made particularly clear in that it ascribes the heroic posture of self-destruction to him.⁵⁰

In their short but rich and influential book, Kris and Kurz identified a number of events in the life of the artist around which fictions and tales tend to cluster: his birth, his mystic initiation and/or the discovery of his talent, as well as moments in which he incurs the envy of the gods or encounters a critical public.

Each of the contributions in the section 'Portraits of the Artist' pursues the work of Kris and Kurz in unravelling the ancient biographical anecdotes concerned, respectively, with ancient musicians and artists. In both cases these anecdotes seek to give verbal expression to the more intangible aspects and challenges of aesthetic responses. Pauline LeVen unpacks how antiquity's anecdotal constructions of the 'musical man', the *mousikos anēr*, spring from the rich tradition surrounding the life of the legendary musician Orpheus. LeVen argues that, though superficially biographical in nature, these clusters of anecdotes essentially pose questions of aesthetics in attempting to impose structure and narrative on the mysteries of musical

performance. In a chapter dedicated to the lives of ancient artists (Chapter 12, 'The artist as anecdote: creating creators in ancient texts and modern art history'), Verity Platt examines the nature of and sources for ancient biographical anecdotes about artists within antiquity. Unlike in the cases of poets, there are no preserved *vitae* of ancient artists; anecdotes thus constitute the bulk of the ancient biographical traditions for this class of creators. Platt nevertheless shows how anecdotes provide critical windows into both the evolution of Classicism and what she terms the 'discourse of art consumption'. A source of pleasure as well as frustration for modern art historians, anecdotes about ancient artists, like those about ancient musicians, tend (predictably) to offer little in the way of historical fact, yet in many cases they mark valuable, as well as culturally specific, commentaries on the nature and mystery of visual representation.

For Ernst Kris in particular, fascination with the commonplace anecdotes about artists marked the confluence of a dual interest and expertise in art and psychoanalytical theory. While a student of art history at the University of Vienna in the 1920s Kris had entered into the personal circle of Sigmund Freud, and during the 1930s he lectured regularly at the Vienna Psychoanalytical Institute. Freud, too, found the life of the artist a fertile ground for the application and development of his own theories. Already in 1910 he had published his essay 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood' ('Eine Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci'), in which he read da Vinci's painting 'The Virgin and Child with St Anne' as a visual representation of a particular childhood homosexual fantasy for which he also found evidence in da Vinci's writings. In this volume, Miriam Leonard (Chapter 13, 'Freud and the biography of antiquity') shows that Freud's methods of constructing and interpreting the biography of da Vinci are not unlike the methods that informed the telling of tales about artists in antiquity. Freud, too, saw an intimate connection between biography and the creative process (as Verity Platt's chapter also discusses). His own construction of 'creative lives' is thus of particular value to the project of this volume, for as Leonard

argues, it is impossible to consider the relationship between biography and questions of creativity without at least implicit recourse to a psychoanalytic framework.⁵¹

The studies gathered here provide a taste of the range of material, both ancient and modern, that testifies to the richness of the tradition for what we have decided to call 'creative lives'. A comprehensive account of our subject would be an impossibility, as an essential premise of our argument is that this tradition is, like the biographical method named for the ancient biographer, inherently (C)hameleon(t)ic: its expressions appear in an infinite variety of shapes and colours. But while each of the chapters here is necessarily rooted in the specifics of one or more case studies, each also contains more general theoretical reflections that extend to the broader questions of life writing, life creating and creative lives. It is thus our hope that the work of this volume, which was largely to explore the twists and winds and overlaps and blurred lines of creative biography in antiquity (and of that biography's equally creative reception in modernity), will serve as both a summons and a challenge – in ancient terms, a πρόσκλησις and πρόκλησις. We invite our own readers to approach these ancient traditions with less of an eye to historical truth (and to uncovering the 'lies' of the ancient biographers) and more in the spirit of the approach that Stoppard's Wilde takes to his 'own' biographical reception. That is, if it is the 'truth' that Wilde walked down Piccadilly with a lily in his hand, it is the complexity of that truth and its relation to biographical subject and biographical author that our contributors have seen as most worth pursuing, in their own creative products of new confrontations with creative lives.

Notes

¹ Stoppard (1997) 93.

² This volume represents the final outcome of work begun at a Laurence Seminar ('Creative Lives: New Approaches to Ancient Intellectual Biography') that was held over three days in the

University of Cambridge Faculty of Classics in May 2010. The editors would like to express their gratitude to the Faculty of Classics for their support of the conference.

- 3 A number of British universities now offer an MA in Life Writing, and newly-founded centres for Life Writing research (such as those at Sussex, Wolfson College, Oxford and a number of the London Colleges) are spreading throughout the country. The current international interest in life writing is also attested by the choice of 'Narrating Lives' as the Presidential Theme at the 2011 Convention of the Modern Language Association in Vancouver.
- 4 Bennett (2009) 9.
- 5 Porter (2006) 301–2 (Porter's emphasis).
- 6 See also Farrell (2002).
- 7 Lefkowitz (1981) viii; (2012) ix–x. Already Fairweather had observed that a number of anecdotes and other 'traditional narratives' are repeated with slight variation across multiple poets' biographical traditions: Fairweather (1974); cf. (1984).
- 8 Lefkowitz (1981) viii.
- 9 Graziosi (2002) 3.
- 10 Most (1996) 35.
- 11 Martindale (2006) 12.
- 12 Kivilo (2010).
- 13 Warsaw, National Museum inv. no. 142333.
- 14 On Sappho's image on pottery and its significance for her early reception see especially Yatromanolakis (2007) ch. 2: 'Ethnographic archives of *vraisemblance* in Attic ceramics'; for an overview of ancient portraits of Sappho see Richter (1984) 194–6.
- 15 Christian Tatianos *Oratio ad Graecos* 31.2; cf. Pfeiffer (1968) 11.
- 16 Cf. Plato *Rep.* 599e–600b. The Homeridae are first mentioned at Pind. *Nem.* 1–3; on their role in shaping the Homeric biographical tradition see especially Graziosi (2002) 208–17.
- 17 See further Rosenmeyer (2006) on the importance of poetic predecessors for ancient constructions of genre: 'Instead of genre criticism, the ancients practiced model criticism. Their allegiances and affiliations connect, not with a mode or a kind, but with a father, a personal guide' (435).
- 18 On poets and poetic citations in Herodotus see LeGrand (1932) 1.147–56 and Ford (2006).
- 19 For example, in true Herodotean fashion the *Vita Aeschyli* offers three competing explanations for Aeschylus' departure for Sicily, all of which hinge upon the poet's disgrace in Athens: Aeschylus lost to Sophocles in the tragic competitions, or was defeated by Simonides in a competition for the best elegy on the Battle of Marathon, or was forced to leave because the terrifying tableau

- of the Furies at the opening of *Eumenides* provoked heart attacks and miscarriages among the spectators: *Vita Aeschyli* §8–9 Radt.
- 20 Homer’s blindness is usually assumed to have been inferred from the depiction of the blind bard Demodocus in *Odyssey* 8; see however Graziosi (2002) ch. 4, ‘Blindness, poverty and closeness to the gods’ on the broader symbolism of blindness in bards.
- 21 Graziosi (2002) 64.
- 22 On the role of biography in the rivalrous rhetoric of comic playwrights see especially Biles (2011) ch. 4, ‘Intertextual biography in the rivalry of Cratinus and Aristophanes’.
- 23 See Rosen (1988) 42–9.
- 24 For an overview of ‘Sappho on the stage’ see Brivittello (1998); on Sappho as a comic figure see Yatromanolakis (2007) 293–312. Gagné (2013) proposes that the chorus leader in Callias’ fifth-century BC *Alphabet Tragedy* is Sappho herself. According to Strabo (Strabo 10.2.9; Menander 258 K-A), Sappho was also mentioned in a comedy by Menander as the first lover to commit suicide from the cliff at Leukas in Sicily; Sappho’s abandonment by Phaon (the reason for her suicide) has proven a defining episode of her biography, from antiquity to the present day: cf. especially Ovid, *Heroides* 15. Most (1996) surveys the motif from antiquity to the twentieth century.
- 25 On Euripides as a comic character see Marelli (2006) and Tammaro (2006).
- 26 *Vita Aeschyli* §11 (*TrFG* 3 T 1).
- 27 On *The Frogs* and ancient literary criticism see especially Hunter (2009) ch. 1: ‘Aristophanes’ *Frogs* and the Critical Tradition’ and O’Sullivan (1992) 7–22; Graziosi (2006) surveys ancient (and some modern) ideas about the relationship between authors’ works and lives.
- 28 Satyrus F 6 fr. 39.9 Schorn = Aristophanes fr. 694 K-A: ο[ί]α μὲν π[οι]εῖ λέγε[ι]ν τοῖς ἐστιν.
- 29 Chamaeleon fr. 41 Wehrli, *ap.* Ath. 1.21e: παρὰ δὲ τοῖς κωμικοῖς ἡ περὶ τῶν τραγικῶν ἀπόκειται πίστις. On the so-called ‘Chamaeleontic Method’ of (inferential) literary biography see especially Arrighetti (1987) and 141–59 and 177–80.
- 30 Lefkowitz (1981/2012), especially ch. 9, ‘Euripides’; see also Roselli (2005) on comedy and Euripides’ early reception.
- 31 Ar. *Ran.* 1246 with *Vita Euripidis* §3 Kannicht (*TrGF* 5.1 T 1) and 944 with *Vita* §7, respectively; cf. Lefkowitz (1981) 88–9; (2012) 91, 96–7. *Frogs* 1004 is directly quoted by *Vita Aeschyli* (§2) as evidence of Aeschylus’ lavish production values.
- 32 On Aristotle and anecdotes about ‘literary’ figures see especially Huxley (1974).

- 33 On the 'Περὶ τοῦ δεινὰ' form, see Leo (1990 [1901]) 104–5 (the first to classify it) and Pfeiffer (1968) 146. On the development of Greek biography in this period see especially Momigliano (1971) ch. 3, 'The fourth century'.
- 34 At least one Περὶ-author even took an interest in 'creative lives' of multiple types: Douris, a pupil of Theophrastus and one-time tyrant of Samos, wrote an *On Euripides and Sophocles* (FGrH 76.70 ap. Ath. 4.14d) as well as an *On Painting and Painters* (Περὶ ζωγραφίας καὶ ζωγράφων); on Douris and early art history see especially Tanner (2006) 212–14; cf. also Verity Platt, Chapter 12.
- 35 Similar also to, e.g., the Occitan *vidas* that precede the poems of the troubadours in medieval *chansonniers* (see the critical edition of Boutière and Schutz (1964)). Compare, too, the medieval tradition of *accessus ad auctores* discussed by Quain (1945).
- 36 For traces of Alexandrian biographical scholarship in the Euripidean *vita* see Hanink (2008) 121–2.
- 37 For a survey see Bing (1993).
- 38 Ἀκούσασθ' Ἰππώνακτος, fr. 191 Pfeiffer.
- 39 See Acosta-Hughes (2002) ch. 1, 'Callimachus and the adaptation of Hipponax' and Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004) 8–11.
- 40 On the figures of the poets in the Catalogue see Caspers (2006) and Bing (1993) 624–30.
- 41 Riginos (1976) 6, n. 11, citing Fairweather (1974).
- 42 Chitwood (2004) 2, citing Lefkowitz (1981).
- 43 See Perry (1998).
- 44 Arendt (1977) 220, n. 43.
- 45 Arendt (1977) 43. The lacuna reads 'when he is invited to do so'.
- 46 Arendt (1977) 43.
- 47 Critchley (2008) xxxv.
- 48 Critchley (2008) xxxv.
- 49 Kris and Kurz (1979) 130.
- 50 Kris and Kurz (1979) 131.
- 51 Cf. Lefkowitz (1981) viii: the ancient biographers' 'starting premise was not dissimilar from that of some contemporary psychologists: that every creative act must have grounding in a particular experience'.

CHAPTER 2

‘LIVES’ AS PARAMETER: THE PRIVILEGING OF ANCIENT LIVES AS A CATEGORY OF RESEARCH, C. 1900

CONSTANZE GÜTHENKE

In their ‘Orientation’, Johanna Hanink and Richard Fletcher speak of ancient biographies as ‘telling receptions of creative work’ that reward close analysis as finely wrought items in their own right. They do so with a view to the consequences that this ought to have for our own attitude towards the biographical, as ancient sources and modern tools alike. This ‘we’ behind ‘our attitude’ presumably refers not only to the modern reader, artist and writer but also to the classical scholar, and the scholarly literature on ancient biography itself thus warrants equal attention as an act of reception, no less telling or finely wrought.

For those in need of an introduction to ancient biography, Momigliano’s *The Development of Greek Biography* (1971; 1993) remains in many ways the reliable and deserved go-to work. A close look at Momigliano’s careful historiography and bibliography suggests that there was in fact a whole cluster of German works roughly around 1900 that signalled particular interest in the nature of *bioi* as a genre, a cluster represented for example by the studies of Bruns (1896), Leo (1901) or Misch (1907). German academic fashions can have a long life, and this group of works is even now regularly referred to in the literature on ancient biography. The peak, at the turn of the century, of interest in biography and the biographical as a form of interpretation of ancient works is a story that is itself revealing about the parameters of classical scholarship and its relationship to creative practices.

Allowing for reservations and modifications, Momigliano’s work engages closely with the question about the importance of an Aristotelian and Peripatetic model for the development

of Hellenistic and ultimately Roman-era biographical writing, essentially the argument of Friedrich Leo's *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer literarischen Form* (1901). For Leo, the teleological thinking about character that distinguished the Peripatos was at the root of a subsequent forking into two 'traditions': on the one hand, that of the Alexandrian grammarians and their compilations of lives, an approach that later gave Suetonius a grid of categories on which information could be variably distributed; and on the other hand, the narrative elaboration of a Plutarch who aimed at presenting the 'overall image of a personality'.¹

Momigliano shrewdly picks up that Leo's Alexandrians, set on compilation, on classification and on a 'scientific form that disregards beauty and rhetorical strategies of representation',² bear a touching or ironic resemblance to Leo's own generation of scholars as workers in the vineyard of positivist history. His Alexandrians could be students of a Mommsen-like Aristotle-figure, who had left to them the details of data-collecting that still needed completing, and Momigliano even goes to the length of quoting an 1884 article by Hermann Usener on the 'organization of scientific work' in the Academy and Peripatos, where Usener made the parallels with current scholarly practice explicit.³

This shared scholarly ethos could be said to extend to subject matter as well. William Clark has shown in his *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* (2006) that classical scholarship, as the rising star of institutionalization, came with a measurable fashion, which peaked in the mid-nineteenth century, for a type of dissertation that would take a little-known writer and collate his fragments, biographical sources and testimonia as fully as possible: a type, in other words, that generated a veritable industry in prosopography as a qualifying disciplinary practice.⁴ Clark links this suggestively, though all too briefly, with contemporary Romantic notions of authorship and individuality, but also with the cultivation of an institutionalized individualism that was tamed, cumulative and collective, and thus not unlike the ethos which Leo, too, suggests in his view of the scientific biographers of antiquity.⁵

That modern scholars like to hint at affinities with their Alexandrian counterparts is not unusual (though it is often glossed over). F.A. Wolf in his *Prolegomena to Homer* (1795) had put an 'original' text of Homer in doubt, or at any rate beyond recovery, and instead made the ancient scholars of Homer our actual first recoverable point of contact with the Homeric poems. For Wolf, the ancient scholar thus stands at the point of our intersection with all earlier sources, invested with similar interests as that of Wolf's own time, when classical philology had begun to rise to the top of the hierarchy of disciplines.⁶ Yet Leo's typology of ancient biographical writers does something in addition, which is no less important for the engagement of classical scholars with the biographical: his division into the scientific, no-frills accounts of the grammarians versus the extended narrative of Plutarch's *Lives* where aesthetic effect is one of the chief structuring principles, is a distinction that pits *Wissenschaft* against art (*Kunst*), and the scholar (*Wissenschaftler*) against the writer (*Schriftsteller*). Scholarship on biography is then ultimately also a form of commentary on the role and identity of the scholar, a role that could easily come into conflict, or at least tension with that of the artist. Clark has recognized the strong biographical focus that was reflected in the practices of classical scholarship and exemplified in the standard format of a doctoral thesis that collated the works, fragments and testimonia of individual authors. He rightly suggests that this could be linked to external, non-academic notions of artistic individuality, too, but he does not spell out the particular tensions that would result, tensions over the status of the scholar vis-à-vis the creative energy that Hanink and Fletcher see mobilized in the engagement with the biographical, ancient and modern. As I hope to show, some of the research around 1900 on ancient lives as a genre does itself address these issues of fictionality, historiography and self-perception quite explicitly.

One of the key operative terms for the content and the constitution of the discipline of classical scholarship had been that of *Bildung*, the notion of education, development, cultivation or formation of the self. This notion gave the

study of antiquity much of its conceptual traction in the academic and cultural landscape since the late eighteenth century, and might help to articulate some of the priorities and structural assumptions of the field.⁷ The *Bildung* of the scholar and the modern individual, as much as the *Bildung* of antiquity as a whole and of its own individuals, operated as mirror concepts. *Bildung* was thus integrated as the *raison d'être* of classical scholarship, as the object of study and as the effect of studying alike. In the logic of a new educational model, inflected by a developing historicism, charting history meant charting *Bildung* as it manifested itself in individual epochs and with regard to individual nations and societies. To define the character of antiquity, therefore, was to describe its biography, and to understand and comprehend its *Wesen* (its essence, character or being). Wilhelm von Humboldt articulates this as a programmatic goal in his essay *On the Study of Antiquity, and of Greek Antiquity in Particular* (1793):

The study of a nation offers all the advantages which history has in general, namely to increase our knowledge of human beings by examples of actions and events, to sharpen our power of judgement, and to improve and raise our character. Yet it does more. In trying not only to unravel the thread of successive events, but rather to explore the condition and the state of the nation altogether, this kind of study gives us a *biography*, as it were. (Humboldt's emphasis.)⁸

Humboldt's mirroring of *Bildung* and biography is symptomatic for the central role given to the biographical, and it suggests that Classics as a discipline was lastingly indebted to making a biographical, developmental model significant for disciplinary self-understanding. As a rhetorical model, this meant a focus on an organic and developmental narrative arch, rather than simply on 'people' and their context.⁹ In other words, this German version of and investment in 'lives' is less like the micro-histories and recovered daily lives of the Annales School or the miller's cosmos in Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976), but would have sounded more like 'The Miller as a Manifestation of *Geist* and Progress'. In any case, by 1900 literary criticism, scholarly practice and the

disciplinary world were all invested in the biographical as a heuristic model of historical consciousness.

1900 is of course not 1800. What defines the later period is that in addition to a relatively stable and by now institutionalized discourse of *Bildung* there was strong momentum to define the Humanities as such vis-à-vis the Sciences. The end of the nineteenth century is the period that sees the arrival of the (particularly German) terminology of *Geisteswissenschaften*, the human sciences, as opposed to the natural sciences – a terminological split particularly elaborated in the work of the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), who, while not a classicist in the strict sense, had enjoyed a traditional classical training and had also been a student of August Boeckh. His first large-scale publication in 1870, not coincidentally, was a biographical project, an extensive (and unfinished) *Life of Schleiermacher*, the philosopher, theologian and translator of Plato, a work that was widely read and well received, including by classical scholars.¹⁰

Dilthey's Human Sciences inhabit their own domain compared to other sciences, and within them biography and autobiographical sources carry most strongly what Laura Marcus has called the promise of a 'self-transparency of consciousness'.¹¹ Dilthey thus found a place for autobiography and biography as an explicit tool of *Wissenschaft* and as the quintessential example for the relationship between historiography, lived experience and interpretation. He worked towards an analysis of those branches of historical scholarship that are not or seem not to be covered by the same methodological precepts as the natural sciences. Their aim, ultimately, is the understanding of the meaning of human action and interaction, which amounts to an understanding of individuals in relation to each other and to an understanding of life in the sense of *lived experience*. This hermeneutic approach that emphasized *Erlebnis* (lived experience) stressed immediacy and the role of empathy as much as it acknowledged that interpretation and understanding rest on historical distance; in fact, it operated with a very paradoxical and complex relationship between the two.¹² What this means for Dilthey's

understanding of historiography, most importantly, is that the individual of the past is the evident unit of historical study, and that lived experience is the element bridging past and present that enables scientific interpretation specific to the 'Humanities' in the first place. What this implied for historiography, including the history of literature, was an understanding of historical and artistic events that followed a (modified Hegelian) model of *Geistesgeschichte*: the spirit of the age was thought to manifest and crystallize itself in strong personalities, and the biographical description of such characters and their *Nachleben* was thus the appropriate method of interpreting literary works, since those formed part of the same manifestation – an outlook articulated in, for example, Dilthey's widely received works *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* (1883) and *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* (1905).¹³

Dilthey's voice, though influential, was not a lonely one. If we look at the national philologies of the time and their notion of literature as a field of scientific inquiry, the 'author biography' had become a normative exercise already before Dilthey, and across Europe.¹⁴ Saint-Beuve's parameter of *l'homme et l'oeuvre*, for example, is a popular formula that makes clear how intimately the terms of biography and literature were connected (as modern terms);¹⁵ but Dilthey's stress on the *Wissenschaft* of the human spirit also exacerbated the underlying tension between the scholar and the creative writer. This was not only because of the comprehensive theory-making on his part but also because once the distinction between the natural sciences and the human sciences rested on the assumption that the Humanities' mode of interpretation is different from the rational standards of scientific proof, emphasizing a cognitive and psychological leap in order to interpret art and the artist, then the relation between scholar and artist was implicitly also opened up for debate. This is the frame in which the Humanities scholar, the *Geisteswissenschaftler*, is both emphatically unlike the creative writer or artist and at the same time linked to the creative acts of writers across historical distance through the pursuit of human interpretation that is qualitatively

different from the epistemological conditions and practices of the natural sciences. Identifying as a professional scholar, the philologist and historian of the turn of the century could have his scientific cake and eat it with an acknowledged, even if ambivalent sense of its creative value. Biography, as method and content, could in this context map perfectly onto the task of the *Geisteswissenschaftler*.

Misch’s *History of Autobiography* (1907)

The first part of Georg Misch’s *Geschichte der Autobiographie*, published in 1907, dealt specifically with antiquity. Misch, by institutional appointment a philosopher, had written his *Habilitation* under the supervision of Dilthey, who also (not untypically for German academic filiation) became his father-in-law.¹⁶ According to Misch’s emphatic belief, his was an academic age of auto/biography, making his work a timely one: ‘The renewal of the *Geisteswissenschaften* in the nineteenth century also brought a specialization of the scientific interest in autobiography’ (4).¹⁷ Misch identifies the term autobiography as a modern parameter that carries in its wake specific standards and expectations about a developed sense of self. Assuming a quasi-Aristotelian human tendency towards expressiveness (*Lebensäusserung*), a desire which describes its own historical trajectory as the ‘great spectacle of a continuous development of spirit/mind’ (*grosse[s] Schauspiel einer kontinuierlichen geistigen Entwicklung*) (66), Misch sees this tendency reflecting the narrative of a path of Western civilization from Egypt to the Ancient Near East, to Greece and Rome. Autobiographical writings thus are the sources for tracing the ‘sense of individuality of western humankind’ (*Persönlichkeitsbewusstsein der abendländischen Menschheit*) (5), and on this point Misch explicitly quotes Dilthey: ‘Autobiography is the highest and most instructive form in which we encounter an understanding of life’.¹⁸ In the third, heavily revised and expanded edition of 1949, Misch extends his praise of autobiography as a tool of historical empathy and hence understanding to the usefulness of biography as its

second-in-command, and as the mode that is properly situated in the realm of *Wissenschaft*:

In remembering facts, the autobiographer experiences a spontaneous resurgence of emotions and tendencies that were part of the original experience; the heterobiographer by contrast needs to bring a high degree of imagination and empathy in order to offer a re-presentation of such feelings stimulated by the telling of past events, in a way that is not artificial. After all, he who writes the history of his own life sees its totality before him and the meaning it contains.¹⁹

And yet, Misch's monumental study also reveals a tension: on the one hand, there is his insight that ancient biography is in many ways radically different from his or for that matter our expectations of the biographical as a narrative unfolding of character development; on the other hand, there is his desire to see Greek writing as a highly developed stage of accounting for the individual self in the modern sense. The solution which he proposes to resolve this tension is a strategy that had been used by scholars since the late eighteenth century and one which he would continue to share with some of his successors, too. This was to treat *bioi* as a genre whose roots were in philosophy – and to stress Socrates and Plato as the figures who could somehow guarantee that modern parameters of individuality and of the biographical would remain applicable to ancient materials.

The Socratic example seemed to put a narrative of personal development and the reflective, examined life centre-stage, linking the individual with the universal. The relation of the soul with a higher order of things is imagined as an ultimate moment of empathy and understanding writ large – in short, a historical hermeneutic based on lived experience is rediscovered and rewritten as a philosophical *eros*, that leaves a text such as Plato's *Symposium* as the basic expression of an individually representative 'history of the soul' (*Seelengeschichte*) – and that imagines such a lived experience, reflected in autobiographical-philosophical discourse, as an 'effect of love' (*Liebeseffekt*), in which rational thought is transcended by way of the power of intuition.²⁰

Another example shows even more strongly how Misch's insight into the 'difference' of ancient biographical materials

struggles with his overarching paradigm, even in the case of Plato and Socrates. This is the case of Plato's *Seventh Letter*, which is allotted a remarkable forty-four pages in the third, expanded edition of the *History*.²¹ The authenticity of the letter, one of a good dozen transmitted in the Platonic corpus, has been and continues to be a bone of contention, though Misch is representative of his time when he treats its authenticity as a matter of (recent) contemporary academic consensus (even though not a unanimous one).²² The orientation of the letter, which Mary Lefkowitz also discusses later in this volume, is strongly biographical: it is organized around Plato's ostensibly autobiographical account of his visits to the court of Dionysius II, tyrant of Syracuse, and his entanglement there with political intrigue as much as his educational effort at making Dionysius a philosopher-king on behalf of his peer and rival Dion, who in turn becomes an important reference and friendship figure for Plato. (The fact that Plutarch's *Dion* seemed to complement the letter by offering similar biographical materials only cemented the place of that epistle in the gallery of texts treated as essentially biographical in tone and content.) That we appear to be dealing here with a Plato drawn between the spheres of public, political life and the intellectual world of the academy might well have given the text extra urgency for a scholarly readership preoccupied with the standing and role of the institutionalized academic, bringing into even greater focus how attractive the figure of the (Platonic) philosopher seems to have been as a model of identification and projection for the modern scholar.

When we read carefully, though, it becomes clear that Misch is himself critically aware that the material cannot simply be used for a biography of the philosopher 'as some eminent classical scholars want it to be' (126). Misch himself leaves open the question of authorship, and he is sceptical about what constitutes true 'biographical' or autobiographical elements:

That Plato does not fashion himself as the philosopher the same way he fashions Dionysius as the tyrant and Dion as the ideal statesman may seem quite true to life to the modern reader, who considers himself closest to the

reality of life when he sees a man in all his inconsistencies. But to approach this apologia with such a positivist understanding of realism means to misunderstand altogether its literary character and to sever its link with the realm of Platonic philosophy. Analysis shows that the material is deliberately shaped: just not out of the entirety of Plato's personality, but instead in pieces, according to the stances he takes and the roles he plays. We are handed parts of an image of Plato, yet without the intellectual and spiritual bond that unites them ... All together this suggests to us that self-representation has a different function than the one we are familiar with: it does not include the autobiographical intention which to us gives a certain philosophical dignity to self-presentation, namely to understand life from life itself.²³

Misch, for sure, acknowledges that the *Seventh Letter* may show a Plato whose complexity we can understand as a modern phenomenon, but that the *Letter* does not fit his own, modern, categories as it ought to. He sees in the *Letter* material that seems disconnected and constructed with a clear agenda in mind, yet no real 'spiritual link' or narrative-reflective cohesion. His diagnosis, though, is not that which might now be ours, namely that ancient biography has its own rationale that might explain what to us looks disjointed. While Misch comes close enough to this position, he does conclude that the gulf between ancient and modern biography is not one of degree, to be bridged by the Socratic or Platonic narrative of the self, but that instead it is one of quality and of a historically differentiated functionality, which may render the grand arch of the development of the biographical, self-reflective account of Misch and others an inappropriate parameter. Rather, Misch's conclusion is that the claim of authenticity of the *Seventh Letter* must (unfortunately, for him, that much he admits) be wrong. The modern notion of auto/biography as a hermeneutic method of the kind Misch imagines it to be thus turns out to be dominant enough to shape the data, rather than let itself and its assumptions be worried by it. The modern expectations about individuality and its reflection in the biographical process override interpretation shaped solely by the textual record of antiquity, not so much because of an unreflected reliance on modern parameters or an unwillingness to acknowledge historical difference (quite the contrary in

Misch’s case), but rather because the biographical moment has come to enjoy a particular place within the method of philosophical interpretation (as modern) itself.

Wilamowitz’s Plato (1919)

One of the ‘eminent scholars who want[s] the *Seventh Letter*’ to be [authentic]’ was certainly Wilamowitz, who offered his own 500-page strong biography of Plato in 1919 (and whom Misch might therefore have had in mind when he devoted this long section to the *Letter* in the 1949 edition). Wilamowitz’s biographical study puts Plato the individual centre-stage and offers essentially a reflection of the identity of the modern scientist. His Plato is in some (or rather in many) ways an extreme; still, he seems to be symptomatic of the tensions and expectations that were invested in biography as a tool of interpretation. Wilamowitz’s is also another such attempt, like that of Misch and others before him, to establish Plato as the axis around which ancient biography can be made to fit a modern definition. In the process, his Plato also turns out to be strongly characterized as a figure of the *Wissenschaftler* overcoming the desire to be an artist.²⁴

Wilamowitz reviewed Misch’s *History* the same year it was published, and he fully acknowledged Dilthey’s influence on it.²⁵ Following Misch, and in turn following Leo, he, too, commented on the strand of scholarly-scientific life writing of the Alexandrian kind – and he, even more explicitly, found it surprisingly wanting. His criticism, in fact, amounts to the strongly worded and remarkably far-reaching claim that the Greeks simply never understood real individualism:

Learned/scholarly biography collects separate character traits, arranges them into categories and makes no real effort to connect them into a whole. The school of Aristotle, which knows so well how to observe and classify plants and animals, attempts the same for human beings. It perceives the particular, the character (it gave us the term itself), and traces them through an entire life as it is lived. But there is never enough attention to what is individual ... Hellenistic scholarship knows how to see what is typical; but there is no progress in that ... We must not deny that Greeks have never

truly understood how to understand and grasp a man, just as they have not been able to produce true historiography. *The observer always remains aloof, instead of putting himself into the place of the other's soul.* Instead of understanding, he praises or criticizes. What is more, another man is always treated as something finished, or whole, never as something in the process of Becoming. Where is there ever an insight into the complexities and tensions that are part of a rich soul and that together make up its true individuality?²⁶ (My emphasis.)

There are two exceptions, though. The first is tragedy, for tragedy created 'entire human beings who let us experience how they became who they are' (*ganze Menschen, bei denen wir empfinden, wie sie so werden mussten*).²⁷ The other, of course, is Plato.

Wilamowitz's belief in Plato as a true and rare representative of individuality was only intensified in his biography of the philosopher, the main aim of which was to show Plato 'the man' (*den Menschen*). The focus is explicitly not on philosophical content or the details and system of Plato's philosophy; it is on the 'thinker' (*Denker*), not the 'thought' (*Gedanken*), thus echoing one basic form of the hermeneutic task since the early nineteenth century, namely that of understanding the author, rather than the work. Moreover, unlike the ancients' aloofness in their own biographical writings, Wilamowitz's method is emphatically to 'see the poet, with whose soul I try to empathize' (*So sehe ich den Dichter, in dessen Seele ich mich einzuf  hlen versuche*).²⁸ Wilamowitz grudgingly acknowledges that Plato himself may still display a remarkable lack of belief in individuality (meaning in strongly individual psychological developments), though he then counters this insight by appeal to the 'strong feeling' that is evident in Plato's writings, 'because Plato himself had such a strongly individual soul' (*weil Platon selbst eine so stark individuelle Seele besa  *).²⁹ In other words, in spite of himself, Plato's own individuality cannot but break through.

By interpreting Plato as someone motivated by a desire for *Wissen*, Wilamowitz reformulates his, that is Plato's, *Wissenschaft* as the ultimate practice of knowledge: in turn, our own (and Wilamowitz's) *Wissenschaft* is to understand Plato's *Wissenschaft* as inseparable from his biography: 'It is

my task to show this Plato and this philosophy. The path he takes and prescribes for us is that of strict science'.³⁰ The 'highest and ultimate' (*Allerletztes und Höchstes*), however, cannot be scientifically proven (*ist wissenschaftlich nicht beweisbar*), but can be intuited, in a language that is not accidentally Platonic itself, through inner experience (*angeschaut durch inneres Erleben*).³¹ At the same time, the Plato whose development Wilamowitz so painstakingly outlines, is the young man torn between the personal aspiration to become a poet and the insight of his vocation as a teacher and thinker, which ultimately forces him to renounce the life of the poet. In a fundamental way, we are left again with the triad of *Wissenschaft – Erlebnis – Dichtung* popularized by Dilthey, simultaneously as method and object of study. The method discovers itself completely in the material it is applied to.

Platonic philosophy, the scholar's work and the modern scholar's identity are thus all interdependent in Wilamowitz's late work, united in their focus on the trajectory of the life of the modern scholar, the ancient philosopher and of culture writ large. As Wilamowitz puts his imperative at the end of the opening chapter of the Plato biography:

If a work of art is a piece of life, viewed through a temperament, or better through an individual human soul, then the correct interpretation of a whole work of art must be the same, and even more so the correct interpretation of a whole human life. However much we strive for scientific objectivity, nothing can change this.³²

It is easy enough to treat Wilamowitz's *Platon* as an atypical work: a work, as he himself readily admits, that breaks with the conventions or expectations of scholarship on ancient philosophy, and instead a deeply personal work that reflects a life-time of reading and growing with Plato, written during the upheavals of World War I and seen by Wilamowitz as both a form of consolation and an appeal for humanistic learning.³³ And yet, however much one wants to allow special pleading for the shape of the work as an outlier, Wilamowitz, who sees this work as a culmination, is explicit in his desire to maintain

the claim of this art of interpretation for the side of *science*, that is to say the world of the regulated academy, and in trying to keep it contained there:

Nobody will invest a good part of his life and his energy into a task of this kind if he did not love the man and his work; ... The philologist is an interpreter, a translator, though not merely of words: he will not understand them fully unless he also understands the soul from which they spring. He has to be the interpreter of this soul, too. For that reason, biography is the true work of the philologist, raised to a higher level: it is a hermeneutic art.³⁴

Paradigmatically, Wilamowitz insists on the particularity of *Wissenschaft* as sharing in both the accountability of scientific method and the necessity for artistic energy, however different the latter looks from the world of poetic and artistic creativity beyond the academy. And, paradigmatically, this plea is prompted by the work of biography.

Coda

The person who more than anyone else had provoked Wilamowitz's outrage over the collapsing boundaries of science and art, or inside and outside of the academy, was, of course, Friedrich Nietzsche. If one runs the numbers (as Jonathan Barnes has done), then it becomes clear that the bulk of Nietzsche's own philological scholarship before the publication of the *Birth of Tragedy* and his decision to abandon the world of academia was on ancient biographical materials of just the kind which Wilamowitz found so disappointingly lacking in a real sense of individuality.³⁵ That Nietzsche produced three substantial publications on the sources of Diogenes Laertius, dating from 1869 and 1870 and together making up one half of all his published *Philologische Schriften*, is more than coincidence. It shows instead that the concerns thrown up by making the individual life a meaningful and representative category for the interpretation of antiquity could, when they were retrojected onto the ancient materials available, lay bare tensions that reached across the whole spectrum of classical scholarship – including Nietzsche as much as Wilamowitz,

whom we tend to cast as opposites (following their own lead), rather than see as part of a shared scholarly world.

Nietzsche’s scholarship on Diogenes Laertius centred around a basic hypothesis: that Diogenes, writing his *Lives of the Philosophers* at the end of the third century AD, relied on the work of Diocles of Magnesia (whom he dates late to the first century AD), and in fact offered largely an *epitome* of his work, supplemented with a few other sources and with Diogenes’ own epigrams. Importantly, the hypothesis also included, as Barnes points out, the notion that Diogenes’ agenda was in fact that of a *poet* who felt the need to construct a scholarly frame in which to embed his real focus – his poetic epigrams on a range of philosophers – and that it was this that could be unpeeled as the true motivation for the narrative and analytical frame of the *Lives* (on the epigrams see also Richard Fletcher, [Chapter 10](#)).

Nietzsche himself would go on to follow some of his Classics colleagues in battling with an ambivalent image of Socrates as an ‘academic’. His early scholarship is a good reminder, though, that at this intersecting point of the extremes of classical research around 1900 lies a preoccupation with the biographical, as a functional element in determining what classical scholars are meant to do, who they are, and what they are not. In *The Legend of the Artist* Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz make reference to what they call ‘enacted biography’: the effect of biographical, narrative expectation on the actual practices and self-imagination of artists.³⁶ To examine the attitude of scholars towards ancient biography might eventually lead us also to ask what our own generic conventions of scholars’ lives are, how much they shaped and were shaped by ancient precedent, and how they might have been and still are interacting with disciplinary practices and expectations.

Notes

1 Leo (1901) 187.

2 Leo (1901) 178.

3 ‘There are enough indications that the early Peripatetics collected biographical material, wrote definite biographies, and generally

stimulated what we call Alexandrian scholarship. But anyone who reads Leo's chapters on the Peripatos carefully will have to admit that Leo sees Aristotle as an ancient Mommsen urging his pupils to do what he had no time to do himself and creating the conditions for new branches of learning to develop', Momi-gliano (1993) 20, with reference to Usener (1884) on the Academy and the Peripatos.

- 4 Clark (2006) 227.
- 5 Clark (2006) 210–11.
- 6 On Wolf's relative 'invention' and the undoubted rise of *Altertumswissenschaft* as a discipline, see most recently Harloe (2013).
- 7 It is, of course, arguable that *Bildung* as a part of neo-Humanist rhetoric became an increasingly empty placeholder as academic specialization and research culture took over; for a literature review and an argument for the staying power of the concept of *Bildung*, see Güthenke (2015).
- 8 'Das Studium einer Nation gewährt schlechterdings alle diejenigen Vortheile, welche die Geschichte überhaupt darbietet, indem dieselbe durch Beispiele von Handlungen und Begebenheiten die Menschenkenntniss erweitert, die Beurtheilungskraft schärft, den Charakter erhöht und verbessert; aber es thut noch mehr. Indem es nicht sowohl dem Faden auf einander folgender Begebenheiten nachspürt, als vielmehr den Zustand und die gänzliche Lage der Nation zu erforschen versucht, liefert es gleichsam eine *Biographie* derselben'; Humboldt (1968) 257.
- 9 For the strong presence of organic imagery in academic and non-academic writing of that foundational period, see also Vick (2002).
- 10 For readership and reception see Lessing (1993). This intellectual biography of a thinker and his age was intended to be published in at least two volumes, of which, as so often with Dilthey's works, only the first was published in complete form. Late in life, he tried (unsuccessfully) to finish both the *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* and the second volume of the Schleiermacher biography, as respective summaries of his overall theoretical and historical thought; see Makkreel (1993) 49–51. The drafts of the second volume (running to almost 800 print pages!) have now been published as volume 14 of Dilthey's *Gesammelte Schriften*.
- 11 Marcus (1994) 147. For the importance of Dilthey's comments on autobiography, see also Popkin (2005) 17–19.
- 12 See, for example, Morat (2008) 101–18.
- 13 A little later, works such as the Goethe biography (1920) by Friedrich Gundolf, professor of German literature and member of the circle around the poet Stefan George, as well as his works

on Shakespeare and Caesar, would be representative of this notion of *Geistesgeschichte* as scientific method (and work of art, in the case of the George circle in particular), as much as of the success of historical biography as an extraordinarily successful genre of popular literature in the decade(s) around 1900. Dilthey focused mostly on artists and thinkers, unlike the members of the George circle, who expressly include statesmen (Barbarossa, Caesar, etc.) in their purview. Gundolf in turn had considerable impact on the classicist Albrecht Dihle's work on biography in the 1950s. Dihle reprises the theme of Socrates as a charismatic personality and model for the auto/biographical tradition; for the context see Momigliano (1993) 16–21.

- 14 For the biographical in German literary studies, see Kruckis (1994).
- 15 Jefferson (2007) argues in detail that the terminology of biography and literature would, from the mid-late eighteenth century, develop as critical terms in corrective dialogue with each other. She treats both as quintessentially modern notions, with ramifications for disciplinary development as much as for concepts of authorship.
- 16 For a detailed, yet succinct, account of the impact of Dilthey on Misch, see Mezzaninica (1999–2000).
- 17 'Mit der Erneuerung der Geisteswissenschaften im 19. Jahrhundert spezialisierte sich das wissenschaftliche Interesse an der Selbstbiographie.'
- 18 'Die Selbstbiographie ist die höchste und am meisten instruktive Form, in welcher uns das Verstehen des Lebens entgegentritt', Dilthey (1910) 10.
- 19 'Im Autobiographen steigen zugleich mit den Tatsachen in der Erinnerung spontan die Gefühle und Strebungen wieder auf, die zu dem einstigen vollen Erlebnis gehörten, wogegen der Heterobiograph einen hohen Grad von Phantasie und Einfühlungsvermögen haben muss, um in seiner Darstellung solche Regungen unverkünstelt zu vergegenwärtigen, die durch die geschilderten Ereignisse ausgelöst wurden. Schliesslich hat, wer es unternimmt, die Geschichte seines eigenen Lebens zu schreiben, dieses als ein Ganzes vor sich, das seine Bedeutung in sich trägt', Misch (1949) 9–10.
- 20 Misch (1907) 82.
- 21 Misch (1949) 114–58. That Misch should give so much room to Plato's letter indicates his continuing engagement with this particular author and the role of Plato as a central figure for intellectual history in classical scholarship.
- 22 The consensus Misch speaks of is a question of majority opinion rather than absolute consensus, though; for an overview of the

(mostly German) literature before the 1910s, see Hackforth (1913), esp. 84–131. Hackforth himself defends the authenticity of the *Seventh Letter*. The discussion is on-going.

- 23 ‘Einem modernen Leser, der der Wirklichkeit des Lebens am nächsten zu sein glaubt, wenn er den Menschen mit all seinen Widersprüchen sieht, mag es lebenswahr erscheinen, dass Plato sich nicht als den Philosophen stilisiert wie Dionys als den Tyrannen und Dio als den idealen Staatsmann. Aber mit diesem positivistischen Begriff von Wirklichkeit an die Rechtfertigungsschrift heranzugehen, bedeutet, ihren literarischen Charakter in sein Gegenteil verkehren und ihre Verbindung mit der platonischen Gedankenwelt zerreißen. Wie die Analyse gezeigt hat, ist der Stoff bewusst geformt: nur nicht aus dem Ganzen von Platos Persönlichkeit heraus, sondern stückweis, je nach den Haltungen, in denen er sich vorführt oder den Rollen, die er spielt. Wir bekommen Teile eines Plato-Bildes in die Hand ohne ein geistiges Band ... *Alles weist darauf hin, dass die Selbstdarstellung hier eine andere Funktion hat als die uns geläufige: sie schliesst nicht die autobiographische Intention in sich, die für uns der Selbstdarstellung eine philosophische Würde gibt, das Leben aus dem Leben selbst zu verstehen*’, Misch (1949) 157–58 (emphasis added).
- 24 Wilamowitz is well aware of the anecdote of Plato’s early aspirations as a dramatist, burning all his tragedies after his encounter with Socrates: Diogenes Laertius 3.5.
- 25 The review was published as ‘Die Autobiographie im Altertum’ in *Internationale Wochenschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik* 1 (1907), reprinted in Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1972). In the scant literature on Wilamowitz and Dilthey, for example, Oehler (1979), Wilamowitz is usually portrayed as entirely disconnected from the contemporary debate about the *Geisteswissenschaften* – unjustifiably so. For evidence to the contrary, Landfester (1979); Calder and Rugullis (1992).
- 26 ‘Die gelehrte Biographie sammelt Einzelzüge, ordnet sie nach bestimmten Kategorien und versucht kaum ihre Zusammenfassung zur Einheit. Die Schule des Aristoteles, die so vortrefflich Pflanze und Tier zu beobachten und zu beschreiben weiss, tut es auch für die Menschen. Sie erfasst die Kennzeichen, die Charaktere (sie hat dies Wort für uns umgeprägt) und verfolgt das Spezifische durch die ganze Lebensführung. Aber das Individuelle kommt dabei selten in Betracht, immer zu kurz ... [124] Die Fähigkeit, das Typische zu sehen, bleibt der hellenistischen Wissenschaft; aber ein Fortschritt wird nicht gemacht ... Wir dürfen nicht verschleiern, dass die Hellenen, ebensowenig wie sie

eine wirkliche Geschichtsforschung erzeugt haben, einen Menschen ganz wirklich aufzufassen nicht verstanden haben. Immer bleibt der Betrachter draussen stehen, wo er sich doch in die fremde Seele versetzen sollte. Statt zu verstehen, lobt oder tadelt er. Und immer ist ihm der Mensch etwas Fertiges, Ganzes, niemals wird er als etwas Werdendes betrachtet. Wo hätten sie je die Widersprüche erfasst, die sich in jeder reicheren Seele finden, und deren Vereinigung erst ihre Individualität macht?', Wilamowitz (1972) 123–4.

- 27 Wilamowitz (1972) 124.
- 28 Wilamowitz (1919) 454.
- 29 Wilamowitz (1919) 470.
- 30 'Diesen Platon und diese Philosophie zu zeigen, ist meine Aufgabe. Der Weg, den er geht und den er weist, ist die strenge Wissenschaft', Wilamowitz (1919) 1.
- 31 Wilamowitz (1919) 1.
- 32 'Wenn ein Kunstwerk ein Stück Leben ist, gesehen durch ein Temperament, besser durch eine individuelle Menschenseele, so muss die rechte Interpretation eines ganzen Kunstwerkes dasselbe sein, und die Interpretation eines ganzen Menschenlebens erst recht. Daran ändert alles Streben nach wissenschaftlicher Objektivität nichts', Wilamowitz (1919) 9.
- 33 Wilamowitz (1919) 9. For the context of Wilamowitz's attitude to the War and his implication in both nationalist fervour and internationalist disappointment, see Norton (2008).
- 34 'Niemand wird ein gut Teil seines Lebens und seiner Kraft an eine solche Aufgabe setzen, wenn er nicht den Menschen und seine Philosophie liebt; ... Der Philologe ist nun einmal Interpret, Dolmetsch, aber nicht nur der Worte; die wird er nicht voll verstehen, wenn er nicht die Seele versteht, aus der sie kommen. Er muss auch der Interpret dieser Seele sein. Denn weil sie ihre ganze Kunst im Interpretieren bewährt, ist die Biographie recht eigentlich Philologenarbeit, nur in höherer Potenz', Wilamowitz (1919) 4.
- 35 For much of the following see Barnes (1986), with further references.
- 36 Kris and Kurz (1979) 132. Kris and Kurz only preview this field in the final paragraph of their essay, and they frame the issue of interdependency mainly in the language of psychology, rather than historical sociology or representation (not coincidentally, given Kris' experience and secondary career as a psychoanalyst and later as a researcher in that field: see Verity Platt, Chapter 12 and Miriam Leonard, Chapter 13): 'Biographical formula and life appear to be linked in two ways. Biographies record typical

events, on the one hand, and thereby shape the typical fate of a particular professional class, on the other hand. The practitioner of the vocation to some extent submits to this typical fate or destiny. This effect relates by no means exclusively, or indeed primarily, to the conscious thought and behavior of the individual – in whom it may take the form of a particular “code of professional ethics” – but rather to the unconscious. The area of psychology to which we point may be circumscribed by the label “enacted psychology” (132).

PART II

REVIVING DEAD POETS

CHAPTER 3

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE ANCIENT POETS

BARBARA GRAZIOSI

In his *Autobiography*, Malcolm X claims that the Homeric Question is something that preoccupied him during his incarceration:

It was right there in prison that I made up my mind to devote the rest of my life to telling the white man about himself – or die. In a debate about whether or not Homer had ever existed, I threw into those white faces the theory that Homer only symbolized how white Europeans kidnapped black Africans, then blinded them so that they could never get back to their own people. (Homer and Omar and Moor, you see, are related terms; it's like saying Peter, Pedro, and petra, all three of which mean rock.) These blinded Moors the Europeans taught to sing about the Europeans' glorious accomplishments. I made it clear that was the devilish white man's idea of kicks. Aesop's Fables – another case in point. 'Aesop' was only the Greek name for an Ethiopian.¹

What Malcolm X decided to do in prison (i.e. devote the rest of his life to 'telling the white man about himself') is expressed in terms of an ancient Greek life. And that ancient life turns out to be the life of a black slave. The blinding of Homer – the most traumatic event in the poet's ancient biography – becomes an image for the Middle Passage, the defining catastrophe in the collective history of the African-American people, the point of no return. Malcolm X presents Homer not only as a kidnapped ancestor, however, but as a literary precursor. The white man wants to hear about his own great deeds, and what Malcolm X sets out to do is precisely to sing about the deeds of the white man, even if in terms that do not conform to eulogy. The *Autobiography of Malcolm X* thus sets out to emancipate Homer's original project: rather than 'the Europeans' glorious accomplishments', it promises an account of their misdeeds.

The point of contestation is not, in the first instance, the content of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (which is immediately conceded as what Europeans like to hear), but the identity of the author, and therefore the context, process and meaning of his creation. The fact that there is a scholarly Question about Homer opens up space for this shifting of the poet's identity.

Malcolm X insists on a close correspondence between his own life and that of the ancient poet: we are never allowed to forget that what we are reading is, in point of fact, autobiography. And yet he casts his argument as an academic disquisition, making references to modern linguistic theory and ancient evidence. He includes an explicit (if spurious) etymology for the name Homer/Omar/Moor, buttressed by a didactic aside on Peter/Petro/petra. He also refers to ancient (and equally spurious) etymologies preserved in the *Lives* of Homer, according to which ὄμηρος means 'hostage', or 'blind'.² What we have, in short, is a modern fictional biography based on ancient fictional *Lives* – an account that stands at several removes from any historically reliable treatment of the Homeric Question. It is perhaps no coincidence that Mary Lefkowitz, who demonstrated the fictionality of the ancient *Lives* of the poets, also set out to debunk the Afro-American myth of the 'stolen legacy', which is at the heart of Malcolm X's account of Homer.³

In her early work, both ancient and modern fictions are rejected in the name of historical fact. Invented biographies of ancient authors do not belong to the history of literature, Lefkowitz argues in the first edition of her influential *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (1981), because they fail to offer reliable evidence on the actual lives of ancient authors. The argument makes good sense, and yet it also points to a problem – for it seems paradoxical to exclude fiction, and more specifically fictional authorial representation, from the history of literature. Lefkowitz herself, in her revised edition of her book on the *Lives* of the poets, sets out 'to provide a more sympathetic portrait of the writers who tried to create biographies for the poets whose works they admired'.⁴ In this chapter I investigate a specific aspect of the relationship between the ancient poets and their later admirers: the

(auto)-biographical impulse to create the ancient poet in one's own image. I treat this impulse as a mode of literary reception.

From antiquity to the present, readers have produced a vast range of narrative and visual portraits of the ancient poets. They tell the stories of the poets' lives, sculpt their faces, encounter them in dreams, have imaginary conversations with them, pretend to exchange letters, and visit the places where the poets are supposed to have lived and died. For all their variety, these different engagements with the ancient poets draw from three basic elements: an interpretation of the poets' works; the conventions of biography, portraiture, epistolography and other relevant genres; and the personal, lived experience of the people who imagine the poets. The first two of these ingredients have been studied to a far greater extent than the third. Scholars are able to show how specific lines of poetry give rise to particular biographical fictions: in so doing, they follow the seminal example of Lefkowitz herself in her *Lives of the Greek Poets*.⁵ They also trace how the conventions of biographical writing and portraiture shape representations of the poets.⁶ What is often sidelined, by contrast, is the correspondence between the ancient poets and those who imagine them, which is so evident in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, for example. This correspondence is either ignored altogether, or condemned as tendentious and self-serving. In the case of Malcolm X, it is certainly both – and yet it also points to an important mode of literary reception.

In what follows, I consider three close encounters between ancient and later poets: Theocritus' reaction to a statue of Anacreon; Petrarch's epistolary exchange with Homer; and Salvatore Quasimodo's encounter with Aeschylus on a Sicilian beach. My three examples are deliberately disparate: one is ancient, the other from the Renaissance, the third belongs to the mid-twentieth century. Together, they begin to suggest how the poets of ancient Greece are entangled in explorations and presentations of the self. It is no coincidence, of course, that my chosen protagonists – Theocritus, Petrarch and Quasimodo – are all themselves poets, and reflect on their literary identity when engaging with their earlier colleagues. But, as

the opening quotation from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* makes clear, identifications need not require the adoption of a poetic *persona*. What they do require is a recognition of the ancient author in oneself.

Theocritus and Anacreon

Anacreon was an ancient dandy. As soon as he arrived in Athens from Samos, probably at around 520 BC, local vase-painters drew him as an elegantly dressed lyre-player, surrounded by revellers. The instant popularity of Anacreon on vases (see also Johanna Hanink and Richard Fletcher, [Chapter 1](#)) may suggest that ‘his reputation partly preceded him’ and even perhaps that some vases were ‘meant to honour the occasion of his arrival’.⁷ Alternatively, he was so flamboyant that he immediately inspired local artists. One red-figure kylix of c. 515 BC represents him handling his lyre, and approaching two young men.⁸ Another fragmentary vase, by the Keophrades painter, pictures the poet with his lyre and three other revellers, all of them dressed in showy long tunics, and one holding a parasol. A third vase, a red-figured lekythos of c. 500–490 BC, depicts Anacreon in a long tunic, cloak, shoes, wreath and fillet, holding his customary lyre, again accompanied by two young men. On these three vases, the lyre-player, or his lyre, is labelled ‘Anacreon’. Several other vases also depict a lyre player accompanied by revellers in long robes, sometimes sporting parasols and other exotic accessories. Scholars debate whether all these vases depict Anacreon, or whether they reflect a more general fashion (on vase and, we can imagine, also in the streets of Athens).⁹ The coincidence of dates is, in any case, remarkable: textual sources suggest that Anacreon arrived in Athens towards the end of the sixth century, and that is when vases depicting a flamboyantly dressed lyre-player started to be produced, some of them labelled ‘Anacreon’.¹⁰ The lyre player with his exotic revellers went out of fashion, as a subject of vase painting, by the mid-fifth century – only a few decades after Anacreon’s death.

Given that some of the vases depicting Anacreon were certainly made during his lifetime, and in the city where he lived, they open up interesting questions about the relationship between the historical man and his status as a subject of representation. The paintings on vase suggest a close engagement with poetry, and not just because they depict Anacreon in the act of playing the lyre. One poem, in particular, acquires interest in relation to the vases. Fragment 388 *PMG* ridicules a certain Artemon who was once a rough man, we are told, but now goes about town all decked-out, holding a parasol, 'as ladylike as anything'. There is an undeniable resemblance between this Artemon (after his makeover) and Anacreon's companions as depicted on the vases. What remains unclear is whether Anacreon makes fun also of himself and his fellow-revellers by attacking Artemon, or whether subtle differences in context or detail, now lost to us, mark Artemon's parasol as different from those sported by Anacreon's own crowd.¹¹ Whatever the exact circumstances, it is clear that a complex dynamic of public performance involved the living, historical Anacreon, his poems, and his appearances on vase.

The relationship between the poet, his work and his portraits radically changed in the centuries following Anacreon's death, when it was no longer possible to meet the living, breathing poet in the streets, and compare him to depictions on vases. It was in the absence of the poet that the biographical imagination flourished. In the words of Peter Bing, the Hellenistic Age was characterised by 'an intense antiquarian interest in poets who were long dead and gone, in the literary greats of the distant past'.¹² This interest led to new and remarkably creative attempts to represent the poets of an earlier age. Statues offered likenesses which, especially given the naturalistic impetus of Hellenistic art, suggested the possibility of a face-to-face encounter. Epigrams posed as inscriptions on the tombstones and statues of the ancient poets, commemorating their biographies as well as their literary works, and again suggesting the immediacy of an encounter, while simultaneously acknowledging its impossibility. The activities of literary scholars in many ways paralleled

those of artists and epigrammatists. As Bing points out, there was a ‘conceptual nexus linking such ostensibly isolated phenomena ... as the Archilocheion of Paros, the biobibliographical lists of Callimachus and the Hellenistic poems on the lives (and deaths) of ancient poets’.¹³ We can reconstruct on the basis of the Suda that Callimachus’ *Pinakes* were biographical in orientation, and inspired further biographical work on the part of his followers, most notably Hermippus.¹⁴ As Momigliano, and more recently Erler and Schorn have argued, biography was a Hellenistic phenomenon, and so was literary history.¹⁵ What is more, these two aspects of Hellenistic culture were closely connected, as the example of Anacreon demonstrates.

No less than sixteen epigrams commemorating this archaic poet survive: only Homer tops his record at twenty-four.¹⁶ This seems surprising, at first sight, and cannot be explained solely as a reflection of the central importance of Anacreon’s work. His charisma as a figure of the imagination must also have played a role. As well as the archaic and classical vases which depicted him, we also know of a classical statue on the Athenian acropolis, which stood right next to that of Pericles’ father.¹⁷ Given the strength of the archaic and classical tradition, it is perhaps not too surprising that Hellenistic engagements with Anacreon focused, with particular insistence, on real and imagined portraits of the poet. Epigrammatists played with the idea of meeting up with Anacreon in the street, even if, in fact, all they could do was see a statue. Leonidas wrote:

Πρέσβυν Ἀνακρείοντα χύδαυ σσεαλαγμένον οἶνω
 θάεο †δινωτοῦ στρεπτόν ὕπερθε λίθου†,
 ὡς ὁ γέρων λίχνοισιν ἐπ’ ὄμμασιν ὕγρα δειδορκῶς
 ἄχρι καὶ ἀστραγάλων ἔλκεται ἀμπεχόναν
 δισσῶν δ’ ἄρβυλίδων τὰν μὲν μίαν, οἷα μεθυπλήξ,
 ὤλεσεν ἐν δ’ ἐτέρῳ ρικνὸν ἄραρε πόδα.
 μέλπει δ’ ἡ Βάθυλλον ἐφίμερον ἡ Μεγιστᾶν,
 αἰωρῶν παλάμῃ τὰν δυσέρωτα χέλυν.
 ἀλλὰ, πάτερ Διόνυσε, φύλασσε μιν οὐ γὰρ ἔοικεν
 ἐκ Βάκχου πίπτειν Βακχιακὸν θέραπα.
 Leonidas of Tarentum, *Greek Anthology* 16.306¹⁸

Close encounters with the ancient poets

Look upon the aged Anacreon, reeling riotously with wine,
Lurching on a rounded pedestal (?)
How the old man, peering dantly with lascivious eyes,
Trails his garment down about his ankles.
Stricken with wine, he's lost one of his two shoes,
Though he's fitted his wrinkled foot to the other.
And he sings of desirable Bathyllus and Megisteus,
Raising the lovesick lyre in his hand.
But protect him, father Dionysus. For it is not right
That a Bacchic servant fall through Bacchus.¹⁹

We are invited to look at Anacreon, and Anacreon himself looks out with wet and lustful eyes. But there is no reciprocity in this gaze, not just because Anacreon is a statue, but also because, even accepting the fiction of a live encounter, he is old (πρέσβυς, the first word of the poem). This old poet is still singing of lovely young men, and he is still trying to lift his sex-crazed . . . lyre in his hand. But in fact Anacreon can no longer handle either love or wine. Rather than sexual desire, what this old poet inspires is a mixture of care and revulsion.

Leonidas prays that Dionysus may spare Anacreon: it is not right that he should embarrass himself; for, after all, he has been a faithful servant of the god, a good poet of the symposium and the *komos*. Leonidas plays with the illusionistic effect of art: we are invited to imagine a real-life encounter, in which a dirty old man inspires an understandable reaction in a young observer ('Please, Dionysus, do not let him fall over and embarrass himself'). The biographical conceit points to a literary concern: the memorialising impulse of both the poem and the statue it purports to describe. Anacreon's age is not just a matter of how he looks (his wrinkled foot!) but also defines his place in literary history. Moreover, the epigram suggests that young poets/new poetry may be more attractive than old, drunken Anacreon. Describing the poet thus becomes a convenient way of summarising his work, and its place in literary history.

Theocritus reacts to this Hellenistic equation between poet and work in another epigram on a statue of Anacreon:

Θάσαι τὸν ἀνδριάντα τοῦτον, ὦ ξένε,
σπουδᾶ, καὶ λέγ', ἐπὶν ἔς οἶκον ἔνθης

Barbara Graziosi

“Ἀνακρέοντος εἰκόν’ εἶδον ἐν Τέῳ,
τῶν πρόσθ’ εἴ τι περισσὸν ὠδοποιῶν.”
προσθεῖς δὲ χῶτι τοῖς νέοισιν ᾄδετο,
ἐρεῖς ἀτρεκέως ὅλον τὸν ἄνδρα.
Theocritus, *Epigram* 17 Gow

Gaze upon this statue, stranger,
studiously, and say when you come home
‘I saw in Teos the likeness of Anacreon,
pre-eminent, if anything is, among poets of yore’.
Add that he enjoyed young boys
And you will accurately proclaim the whole man.²⁰

Here the whole legacy of Anacreon is reduced to a portrait and a sentence: ‘he enjoyed young boys’. There is apparently no need to read any of Anacreon’s poems: the stranger is simply invited to look at the statue, and to remember Theocritus’ own pithy statement. Readers will thus know ‘the whole man’ by a very quick and simple process. Unsurprisingly, the meaning of ὅλον, in this poem, has been much debated. Some readers take it at face value: ‘after having characterised him as a native of Teos and the best of the ancient poets, the addition of a “private” biographical fact such as his well-known amorous inclination could actually be considered the final indispensable detail for a complete portrait of the figure’.²¹ Others insist that ὅλον implies criticism of the biographical tradition: ‘Theocritus’ learned readers would surely have been familiar enough with the Anacreontic corpus – Zenodotus may have already produced an edition – to know that the biographical information inferred here, while certainly representing an important aspect of Anacreon’s (*literary*) interests and themes, could in no way describe “the whole man”’.²² The poems of Anacreon treated of many themes, after all, so Theocritus’ little poem could not possibly summarise the whole man/*oeuvre*.

It seems to me that both interpretations of the word ὅλον are active in the poem, and need to be kept in balance. Hellenistic portraits of Anacreon, whether in stone or in epigrammatic form, act as summaries of his *oeuvre*. Unlike ancient literary criticism, which tends to focus on rhetorical tropes and generic conventions, visual and narrative depictions indicate ‘the sort

of work' that a particular poet composed. In some ways, they are analogous to present-day blurbs and trailers. 'Anacreon enjoyed boys' allows readers to get the general picture and, in that sense, to see 'the whole man'. Indeed this vision of Anacreon became so influential that a whole industry of Anacreontic verse developed precisely around the theme of boys.²³ There was, then, a complex and dynamic interaction between biographical imagination and literary history. Readers pictured the poet on the basis of his *oeuvre*. But then, once the poet was defined and depicted, new works were added to fit his *persona*. First, Anacreon became the poet of boys (not least through the epigrams that I have just quoted), then poems about boys were written in his name. One upshot of this process is that the *Anacreontea* has a much narrower thematic focus than the poems Anacreon actually composed. Theocritus' portrait of Anacreon had prophetic force: being Anacreon became a matter of loving boys. That was all, or 'the whole man'.

At the same time, Theocritus issued a subtle warning against the dangers of biography and portraiture as forms of literary reception. He did so in several ways. First of all, he composed a poem of conspicuous blandness: whereas ekphrastic epigrams of the Hellenistic period typically compete with portraits in their attempts to achieve life-like results, Theocritus' depiction of Anacreon seems oddly faceless.²⁴ The subsequent claim that the portrait and the poem deliver 'the whole man' thus begins to seem suspect. Theocritus moreover invites the stranger to consider the matter 'studiously', σπουδᾷ. And the studious reader will immediately notice a peculiar detail: that the poem is written in the Doric dialect, even though it purports to be an inscription commemorating an Ionian poet in the place where he was born, the Ionian city of Teos. Gow complains about this, noting that Theocritus 'could easily have written in Ionic', had he chosen to do so.²⁵ This is true, but the interesting fact is that he did not. The very first word of the poem, θῦσαι, is ostentatiously Doric, since it cannot be changed to Ionic without altering the metre. By using his own dialect, Theocritus inscribed himself in his little

commemoration of Anacreon, and reminded readers of the epigram that what they were reading belonged to the poet from Sicily. He was right to insist on this, because he too was in danger of being summarised.

A blurb of Theocritus' work, an epigram or portrait, would not focus on his epigram for Anacreon, but rather present him as a bucolic maker of idylls. Indeed, as with the *Anacreontea*, we know that several Theocritean idylls were added to Theocritus' original *oeuvre*, because those sorts of poems were – quintessentially – what he composed.²⁶ In order to claim the epigram about Anacreon as his own work, and avoid summary simplification, Theocritus had to hit us with his broad-vowel injunction: $\theta\acute{\alpha}\sigma\alpha\iota$. The trouble is that if we hear his voice, we cannot see 'the whole' Anacreon. Just as Theocritus' work includes the epigram, so Anacreon's poetry cannot be reduced to the theme of pederasty. It seems that by the third century BC, the 'bio-blurb' was such an important aspect of literary culture, that Theocritus used it not simply in order to commemorate Anacreon, but also in order to articulate a concern about literary reception more generally, including his own.

Petrarch and Homer

Hellenistic epigrams, portraits and *Lives* of the ancient poets fundamentally shaped the subsequent history of literature. They were influential in Rome, for example, and in ways that are only now fully beginning to emerge. Roman poets knew that biographical information would be extracted from their works, and thus used references to their lives to plant the seeds of their own literary reception. Horace, for example, described a miracle he had experienced in his youth, and thereby suggested a parallel between his own life and that of Pindar, his main Greek model in the *Odes*.²⁷ As Andrew Laird discusses in the [next chapter](#) of this volume, ancient biographical accounts of Virgil extracted clues that he had left in his poems, and organised his work in a chronological sequence that became important for later writers: the *Eclogues* were the work of a young man, then came the *Georgics*, and finally the *Aeneid*,

which was left incomplete when the poet died.²⁸ Once the bibliography of Virgil was established and rehearsed, new Virgilian works were composed in order to supply the poet with juvenilia. In an important book, Peirano approaches the *Appendix Virgiliana* precisely as the product of a two-way traffic between author and *oeuvre*, arguing that the works of Virgil shaped his biography, but that in turn biographical accounts inspired the production of new Virgilian works.²⁹ Several forthcoming publications explore how depictions of the Greek poets affected Roman literary culture, and how that culture then shaped perceptions of the Greek poets.³⁰ One important area of investigation is the relationship between ancient biographical traditions and medieval *accessus ad auctores*.³¹ Short prefaces to literary works, which offered biographical information about their authors, became standard medieval tools of literary study, both in the Byzantine east and in the Latin west. Precisely because they had common ancient origins, these prefaces eventually facilitated a *rapprochement* between the literary cultures of eastern and western Europe.

Once knowledge of Greek was lost in the Latin west, memory of the Hellenic poets remained alive precisely through accessory materials that were used for the study of Roman authors, who sometimes mentioned Greek models. It was known, for example, that Homer had appeared to Ennius in a dream, and that Virgil had learnt from both Homer and Ennius.³² For this reason, Homer continued to be honoured as the ultimate teacher of epic, even though his works were lost. And so it was that Dante envisaged an encounter between himself and Homer in the first circle of Hell, proudly claiming that he had been accepted as a member of his 'fair school' (*la bella scola*). Homer, his Roman followers (Virgil, Horace, Ovid and Lucan), and Dante enjoyed an intimate conversation, from which readers of the *Divine Comedy* remain excluded (*Inferno* 4.94–105):

Così vid'ï adunar la bella scola
di quel signor de l'altissimo canto
che sovra li altri com'aquila vola.

Barbara Graziosi

Da ch'ebber ragionato insieme alquanto,
volsersi a me con salutevol cenno,
e'l mio maestro sorrise di tanto;
e più d'onore ancora assai mi fenno,
ch'e' sì mi fecer de la loro schiera,
sì ch'io fui sesto tra cotanto senno.
Così andammo infino a la lumera,
parlando cose che'l tacere è bello,
sì com'era'l parlar colà dov'era.

Thus I saw assemble the noble school of that lord of
loftiest song who flies like an eagle above the rest. After
they had talked together for a time they turned to me
with a sign of greeting, and my Master smiled at this.
And then they showed me still greater honour, for they
made me one of their number so that I was the sixth
among those high intelligences. Thus we went on as far
as the light, talking of things which were fitting for that
place and of which it is well now to be silent.³³

It was this possibility of a close encounter with Homer that inspired later, and more practical attempts to read Homeric epic. Only a generation after Dante, Petrarch managed to obtain a manuscript of the *Iliad*, and employed a Greek speaker from the south of Italy, Leontius Pilate, to translate Homer's text and teach him the ancient language.³⁴ When work on the translation began, Petrarch expressed his enthusiasm by writing a letter directly to Homer (*Familiare* 24.12.1):

Responsio ad epistolam magnam multaque continentem sub Homeri poete missam nomine et apud Inferos datam.

Franciscus Homero graie Muse principi salutem. Dudum te scripto alloqui mens fuerat, et fecissem nisi quia lingue commercium non erat. Nam nec ego grecis literis discendis satis felix, et tu latinas, quibus olim per scriptores nostros adiutus uti solebas, sequentium negligentia dedidicisse videbare; utrinque exclusus conticueram.

Answer to a Long Letter, Full of Information, Sent and Signed by the Poet Homer and Posted from the Underworld

Francesco greets Homer, prince of the Greek Muse. I have long had a mind to address you in writing, and I would have done it had we shared a language. For I have not been sufficiently successful in learning Greek, whereas you seem to have forgotten your Latin, which you once used to

employ with the help of our authors and which, through the negligence of their successors, you seem to have forgotten. Excluded on both counts, I had fallen silent.

Petrarch's delay in writing to the ancient poet is explained here in terms of a mutual failure of communication: Petrarch's Greek is not good enough to understand Homer, but then the Hellenic poet has forgotten his Latin. This paradoxical statement privileges the fiction of a live exchange over the realities of literary history. The genre of epistolography, with its emphasis on intimacy and reciprocity, encourages this perspective – but Petrarch's insistence on a mutual fault still seems extraordinary. He even implies that he is making up for the shortcomings of his ancient correspondent: Homer failed to inspire suitable Latin interpreters, and so Petrarch must now commission Leontius' translation.

It is tempting to conclude that Petrarch writes figuratively, that he describes a practical enterprise (the translation of the *Iliad* into Latin) as if it were a personal exchange with Homer. But it seems to me that, in this case at least, the personal comes before the practical. Petrarch's frustrated desire for contact with Homer inspires everything else: the employment of Leontius, the translation of the *Iliad*, and the exchanges that follow. In his letter, Petrarch even describes the act of reading the *Iliad* as a means of seeing Homer's face (*Familiares* 24.12.2):

Iamque michi sensim spes abibat; praeter enim aliquot tuorum principia librorum, in quibus velut exoptati amici supercilium procul ambiguum et raptim vibrans seu fluctuantis come apicem intuebar, latini nichil obtigerat, nichil denique sperabatur ubi te cominus contemplarer; nam libellus ille vulgo qui tuus fertur, etsi cuius non constet, tibi excerptus tibiue inscriptus, tuus utique non est. Vir iste vixerit, totum te nobis reddet . . .

I had begun to give up hope because, except for some few beginnings of your books – in which I caught a glimpse of you as one beholds from a distance the flashing eyebrow and flowing hair of a longed-for friend – I had nothing available in Latin. In short, I had no hope of seeing you at close quarters; for that little book which is popularly said to be yours (though it is unclear who its author is), and which is derived from you and attributed to you, is certainly not yours. But now, if my translator lives, he will return you to me in full . . .

Petrarch dismisses as inauthentic the *Ilias latina*, and hopes instead to recover the original poem. This, he claims, will finally be a way of seeing Homer ‘at close quarters’. He never manages to do so, however, because he never learns Greek, and Leontius for his part never completes the translation into Latin. Petrarch explains the reasons in personal terms, and again he ends up blaming a Greek (in this case Leontius rather than Homer). Exasperated letters between him and Boccaccio describe Leontius as ‘stubborn’, ‘vain’, ‘volatile’, ‘badly dressed’, ‘head as hard as a stone’, ‘intractable’.³⁵ Nobody would want to learn Greek from a man like him, the letters suggest, and Leontius soon leaves Florence for Byzantium. Dionisotti argues that the letters, for all their *ad hominem* venom, express a more general attitude of suspicion, mistrust and superiority towards Byzantine culture.³⁶ And he rightly sees that attitude as the main impediment to reading Homer. To put it bluntly, Petrarch failed to learn Greek not because Leontius was such a bad teacher, nor again because Greek was an impossibly difficult language (both of which excuses he made), but because he was too proud to learn.

When something interested him sufficiently, he was well able to acquire knowledge, even from his vilified Greek teacher. And what interested Petrarch even more than reading the *Iliad* was Homer, the person. Part of this fascination was no doubt inspired by the medieval *accessus ad auctores*, and Petrarch’s letter to Homer was a response not only to news about progress on the translation, but also to biographical information that was new to him. This information clearly derived from Byzantine sources to which Leontius had access, primarily Tzetzes’ account of Homer’s life.³⁷ To this medieval interest in the author as the point of access to his work, Petrarch added a new, personal craving for company.³⁸

Petrarch cast the prospect of reading the *Iliad* as the occasion for a face-to-face encounter with Homer, a trope that features also in his letters to other ancient authors.³⁹ What seems to be missing in Petrarch’s address to Homer, however, is a sense of ‘community’, or what Hinds describes as Petrarch’s love of

‘crowd scenes’ – situations in which he does not just seek a personal relationship with an ancient author, but also engages with that author’s interaction with his ancient contemporaries or near contemporaries.⁴⁰ Homer is a problem for Petrarch because he cannot imagine a live community around this figure – and here we must note Petrarch’s (very unmedieval) awareness of temporal distances within the past.

That desire for personal closeness, balanced by an awareness of temporal distance, is evident also in a passage from his epic *Africa*, where the Greek poet appears to Ennius in a dream and announces the future birth of Petrarch himself. Here too we see the influence of Greek biographical traditions as accessed via Leontius (Homer is blind, for example, a characteristic that is not emphasised in the Latin sources, and was unknown to Dante), and here too there is a marked interest in the poet as a living and breathing human being. At a superficial level, Homer performs the same function in the *Africa* as he does in the *Divine Comedy*: both Dante and Petrarch claim contact with him in order to establish their place in a canon of great poets.⁴¹ And yet there are differences too. Rather than envisaging a simultaneous, out-of-time meeting in the first circle of Hell, Petrarch constructs his genealogy through prophecies and dreams relayed, through time, in our own secular world, and involving locations that can be placed on a map: the young Petrarch, for example, appears to Homer and Ennius *clausa sub valle (Africa 9.216)*, a reference to Vaucluse, where Petrarch actually grew up. Just as he includes real-life details in describing himself, Petrarch presents Homer in individual rather than symbolic terms. In the *Divine Comedy*, Homer is the poet of epic and hence holds a sword; he is the author of high poetry, and therefore soars like an eagle. In Petrarch’s *Africa*, the ancient poet reveals himself ‘as he appeared when he still lived’. This is how Ennius recalls his epiphany (9.166–75):

Hic nocte sub alta
Aspicio adventare senem, quem rara tegebant
Frusta toge et canis immixta et squalida barba.
Sedibus exierant oculi. Cava frontis ymago

Barbara Graziosi

Horrorem inculta cum maiestate ferebat.
Dirigui. Tunc ille manu similisque videnti
Occupat ancipitem Graioque hec more profatur:
‘Salve, care michi Latie telluris amice
Unice! Quodque diu votis animoque petisti,
Aspice qualis erat quondam dum vixit Homerus.

Then in the depth of night – behold I saw
An aged man draw near, his body wrapped
In fragments of a toga, with a beard unkempt,
His grizzled hair with strands of white.
His sockets had no eyes. That spectral face,
Hollowed and gaunt, bore a crude majesty,
Yet moved my heart to horror. I lay frozen.
Then, as might one whose sight is in his hands,
He fixed me in my fear and in Greek speech
Addressed me: ‘Friend, my only friend among
The Latins, greetings! Here stands what your heart
And mind have so long yearned for, here behold
Homer as he appeared when he still lived.’⁴²

Petrarch presents Homer as a living poet. It is this desire for a personal encounter that inspires the first, faltering steps towards the recovery of ancient Greek literature in the west.

Quasimodo and Aeschylus

One poet who understood Petrarch’s need for transhistorical conversation was the Italian lyricist Salvatore Quasimodo.⁴³ In 1959, when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, an essay he had written on Petrarch’s sense of solitude was reprinted to celebrate the occasion. In it, Quasimodo observed that Petrarch often used the verb ‘to talk’ to describe moments when he was alone.⁴⁴ Solitude enabled conversation with the dead: the deceased Laura (in his Italian poems) but also the poets of antiquity (in his Latin letters). Although ostensibly about Petrarch, this essay also inevitably revealed Quasimodo. Solitude was important to him, as was an acute sense of the passing of time, counterbalanced by a lively and contemporary engagement with ancient literature. Quasimodo’s most famous lyric, for example, echoed the concerns of the archaic Greek Mimnermus:

Close encounters with the ancient poets

Ognuno sta solo sul cuor della terra
trafitto da un raggio di sole:
ed è subito sera.

Each of us is alone on the heart of the earth,
pierced by a ray of sun,
and suddenly it's evening.⁴⁵

Like other writers linked to the hermetic movement, Quasimodo reacted against the mellifluous and nationalistic poetry of D'Annunzio, the bombastic rhetoric of the Fascist regime, and any collective identification between modern Italy and imperial Rome. He described himself as a *siculo greco*, a Greek Sicilian, thus distancing himself from Italy as well as the present. The landscapes of his youth – dotted with Hellenic theatres and temples – gave strength to his poetry.⁴⁶ In an essay that is often seen as a manifesto for the hermetic movement, Carlo Bo described literature as a 'way of life', a form of introspection that aimed at truth.⁴⁷ Rather than a means of collective seduction, he saw it as a solitary method of investigation. Quasimodo's own introspective search, in his poetry, entailed the absorption of ancient Greek literature: today, his most widely read poems are not his own compositions, but his spare and luminous translations of the fragmentary Greek lyric poets.⁴⁸

Inhabiting the same landscapes as the ancient Greek poets meant, for Quasimodo, to live like them. One epigram, which concludes the collection *Il vero e falso verde*, engages closely with the *Life of Aeschylus*. The poem is cast as an invective against an unnamed poet of the north, and suggests that ancient poetry is dead to him:

A un poeta nemico

Sulla sabbia di Gela colore della paglia
mi stendevo fanciullo in riva al mare
antico di Grecia con molti sogni nei pugni
stretti nel petto. Là Eschilo esule
misurò versi e passi sconsolati,
in quel golfo arso l'aquila lo vide
e fu l'ultimo giorno. Uomo del Nord, che mi vuoi
minimo o morto per tua pace, spera:
la madre di mio padre avrà cent'anni

a nuova primavera. Spera: che io domani
non giochi col tuo cranio giallo per le piogge.

To a Hostile Poet

On the straw-coloured sands of Gela
as a child I would lie by the ancient
Grecian sea, many dreams in my breast
and my clenched fists. Exiled Aeschylus there
scanned over his verses and lines forlorn
in the burning gulf where the eagle spied him
that final day. Man of the North who wish me
nothing, or dead, hope for your own peace:
next spring my father's mother will be
a hundred years old. Hope that tomorrow I
shall not be playing with your rain-yellowed skull.⁴⁹

An ancient fiction about the death of Aeschylus can be pieced together from his *Life* and other sources, and Quasimodo alludes to it: when a flying eagle saw the bald head of the poet, he mistook it for a rock, and dropped a tortoise he was holding in his talons, in order to crack open its shell and eat it.⁵⁰ Quasimodo leaves out the colourful detail of the tortoise falling from the sky, because it does not fit the tone of his stark poem. What he offers instead is the image of a forlorn figure in a vast landscape – a description that suits Quasimodo (and indeed Petrarch) rather better than Aeschylus himself, who had no reputation for solitude in antiquity.⁵¹ Different poetic figures are thus superimposed. Halfway through the epigram, however, the ancient and the modern poet part company. Unlike Aeschylus, Quasimodo is still alive, and does not plan to die any time soon: his grandmother is almost 100 years old, after all, and he trusts in his own good genes. It is his rival from the north who will die first, as rain falls on his yellowed skull. Quasimodo is still at play on the golden sands of Gela, at the end of his poem. The suggestion is that the Sicilian Greek lives like Aeschylus, whereas his northern rival can at best die like him – with something nasty (rain or tortoise) falling on his head.⁵²

In order to insist on his personal connection with the ancient Greek poets, Quasimodo made dubious geographical claims: in one essay, for example, he stated that Sappho and Alcaeus lived ‘just across the sea’ from his own island, as if Lesbos were located

somewhere off the coast of Africa.⁵³ More interestingly, he was prepared to do violence to his own biography: he repeatedly and publicly claimed that he was born in the ancient Greek city of Syracuse, whereas in fact he came from the baroque town of Modica.⁵⁴ His insistence caused a degree of embarrassment in official contexts, including when he was awarded the Nobel Prize. Anders Österling, who delivered the award speech, tactfully corrected the poet, while suggesting that his precise place of birth was in any case of little consequence:

Salvatore Quasimodo . . . is a Sicilian by birth. He was born near Syracuse; to be more exact, in the little town of Modica some distance from the coast. It is not difficult to imagine that a region so rich in memories of the past must have been of the utmost importance for his future calling. The relics of the ancient Greek temples on the island, the theatres near the Ionian Sea, Arethusa's fountain, so famed in legend, the gigantic ruins at Girgenti and Selinunte – what a playground for a child's imagination! Here in days gone by the heroes of Greek poetry were guests at the court of King Hieron, here the voices of Pindar and Aeschylus linger like an echo through the ages.⁵⁵

Österling suggested that ancient voices were simply part of the landscape, and that Quasimodo was their modern mouthpiece.⁵⁶ In fact, the alignment between ancient and modern voices required a creative retelling not only of the ancient *Lives* of the poets but also of Quasimodo's own biography. It follows that literature was 'a way of life' for Quasimodo in at least two senses. It was through lived experience in the Sicilian landscape that he claimed his role as an interpreter of ancient Greek poetry. Conversely, however, ancient biographical traditions determined how he represented, and no doubt experienced, his own life.

It seems safe to conclude that the dynamic of authorial representation changes drastically once an author is dead. With Anacreon partying in the streets of Athens, vases and poems engaged with live performances. Once he was dead, the biographical imagination addressed an absence. Perceptions of loss and the passing of time inspire this kind of imagination – and it is no coincidence that all the examples I considered reflect explicitly on death as well as the experiences of the living.

Theocritus' poem poses as a funerary inscription; Petrarch responds to a letter sent from Hades; Quasimodo reflects on Aeschylus' sudden demise, and on his own vitality. It is in the face of death that poets imagine the transhistorical encounter. The question then is how we fit this encounter in the history of literature. Theoretical models that acknowledge personal and intimate relationships between poets of different ages tend to construct genealogies. Harold Bloom, for example, famously presents the history of literature as an enormous family tree, with plenty of anxiety and dysfunction. In Bloom's model, Homer plays the role of the ultimate patriarch: 'Everyone who now reads and writes in the West, of whatever racial background, sex or ideological camp, is still a son or daughter of Homer'.⁵⁷ This is a rather monolithic, 'no-choice' view of the classical tradition: we are sons and daughters of Homer, whether we like it or not, just as we descend from our own parents. But, as Walcott suggests in a moving poem, there are also 'borrowed ancestors'.⁵⁸ And there are imagined encounters, which defy death, the passing of time, and any linear or positivistic notion of literary history. The classical tradition is never just a given, a biographical or biological fact. It is also always a matter of active and creative imagination.⁵⁹

In the absence of authoritative information about the ancient poets, claims about them were always largely based on the specific identities and perspectives of those who made them. This is one reason why biographical traditions are divergent and, often, controversial. Theocritus casts doubt on portraits and bio-blurbs as means of capturing Anacreon's *oeuvre*, and his own. Petrarch resents Leontius' Greek culture, and blames Homer for being unable to express himself in Latin. Quasimodo appropriates the life of Aeschylus in order better to curse a northern rival. After the alleged death of the author and the birth of a (rather theoretical and anaemic) reader, it seems to me that we may usefully focus on some specific and full-blooded readers who received ancient literature, and cast the ancient poets in their own image.⁶⁰

Reader-identification theory, of the kind advocated by Zajko, seems relevant here: she makes the point that people

find it easier to invest of themselves when engaging with open and multifaceted narratives.⁶¹ The ancient biographies of the poets are, even according to the standards and methods of textual criticism (let alone Freudian literary theory as advocated by Zajko) an ‘open tradition’.⁶² It is notoriously difficult to establish the textual relationship between recurring, and yet ever changing, ancient anecdotes and narratives about the poets. Even the most formal texts, the *Lives* which introduce the works in medieval manuscripts, cannot be arranged in neat stemmata: they combine and recombine different biographical elements according to specific needs and purposes. This openness at the level of textual transmission is the symptom of a different kind of openness at the level of interpretation.

Distinct encounters between texts and readers, in specific places and contexts, give rise to different biographical fictions, which are related to each other but do not derive from original, authoritative biographies, let alone biographical ‘facts’. In a recent debate about the reception of ancient literature, Charles Martindale emphasises the need to ‘to theorize the role of “the transhistorical” . . . as a crucial part of the experience of being human, as well as necessary to the understanding of the great texts of the past’. Martindale dismisses dubious appeals to universal human nature, and rather sees the transhistorical as a ‘seeking out of often fugitive human communalities across history’.⁶³ A few such communalities have, I hope, emerged through the (auto)biographical examples discussed here.

Notes

- 1 Malcolm X and Haley (1992) 201.
- 2 For the meaning ‘hostage’, see *Certamen* 3, Proclus *Vita Homeri* 3, *Suda* s. v. Homer and the anonymous *Vita* 1.5; for ‘blind’, see *Certamen* 2–3; *Vita Herodotea* 13, [Plutarch] *Vita Homeri* 1.2 and the anonymous *Vitae* 1.5 and 2.1. Sources are collected, translated and discussed in Bassino (2013).
- 3 Lefkowitz (1997) esp. ch. 5 on the ‘stolen legacy’, and 235, n. 14 on Malcolm X.
- 4 Lefkowitz (2012).
- 5 Lefkowitz (2012); (1st edn, 1981).

- 6 Zanker (1995) is an important example of this approach.
- 7 Rosenmeyer (2006) 29.
- 8 The Anacreon vases are reproduced and discussed in Rosenmeyer (2006) 22–36.
- 9 See Rosenmeyer (2006) 30, with further bibliography.
- 10 The main sources are collected, translated and discussed in Wallis (2014).
- 11 Slater (1978) argues that the fragment expresses ritual teasing among friends in drag; Kurtz and Boardman (1986) argue against this view, and convincingly, in my opinion. See further Gentili and Catenacci (2010) 330–1, who offer a judicious appraisal of the debate in their interpretation of the poem.
- 12 Bing (1993) 620; see also Johanna Hanink and Richard Fletcher, Chapter 1.
- 13 Bing (1993) 621.
- 14 The Suda entry κ 227 Adler states that the *Pinakes* were ‘lists of people, who excelled in every aspect of culture, and lists of what they wrote’.
- 15 Momigliano (1971); Erler and Schorn (2007).
- 16 Rossi (2001) 83.
- 17 On the classical Anacreon and the difficulty of matching up textual reports and surviving statues see Ridgway (1998).
- 18 = Leonidas of Tarentum 31 Gow-Page.
- 19 Translation by Bing (1988a).
- 20 Translation by Bing (1988a).
- 21 Rossi (2001) 284.
- 22 Bing (1988a) 121, who quotes Pfeiffer (1968) 118 on a possible Zenodotean edition of Anacreon.
- 23 Budelmann (2009) offers an excellent discussion of the relationship between Anacreon and the *Anacreontea*, with further bibliography.
- 24 Männlein-Robert (2007a) offers a good discussion of Hellenistic epigrams on art.
- 25 Gow (1952) 531.
- 26 See Hunter (2002).
- 27 For a discussion of the different ways in which Horace engages with the *Lives* of the Greek poets in order to fashion his own *persona* and reception, see Graziosi (2009).
- 28 See also Laird (2010). On how the life of Virgil inspired the poetic careers of others, see Hardie and Moore (2010).
- 29 Peirano (2012).
- 30 I draw attention, in particular, to A. Laird’s forthcoming book for Bloomsbury: *The Lives of the Roman Poets: Criticism and the Myth of Biography*, and to N. Goldschmidt’s current work on a

monograph provisionally entitled *Lives and Afterlives of the Roman Poets*.

- 31 Quain (1945) offers a helpfully broad discussion but he focuses on the Medieval Latin tradition of *accessus ad auctores*, without considering similar approaches in Byzantine literary culture.
- 32 See Pertusi (1964) 399 and Taylor (2013) 158–64.
- 33 Translation by Sinclair (1939).
- 34 The standard work of reference remains Pertusi (1964). See Andrew Laird, Chapter 4 for Petrarch's correspondence with Virgil.
- 35 The relevant passages from the letters are collected in Pertusi (1964) 40–1.
- 36 Dionisotti (1967) 147–9.
- 37 In his masterly study, Pertusi (1964) 73–111 reconstructs what Petrarch already knew about Homer from Latin sources, and what he learnt from Greek texts known to Leontius. In a further step, Pertusi compares the information about Homer contained in Petrarch's letter with Boccaccio's note about Homer in his commentary to Dante's *Inferno*, and is thus able to confirm that Petrarch and Boccaccio knew the same things about Homer: they had both worked with Leontius Pilate.
- 38 Mazzotta (2012) argues that Petrarch's attitude towards Homeric characters is similarly personal, particularly in his tendency to identify with Odysseus.
- 39 See *Familiars* 24.4.9, and 24.11.42–50.
- 40 Hinds (2004): 160.
- 41 For Petrarch's competitive stance towards Dante in the *Africa*, see Marchesi (2009).
- 42 Translation by Bergin and Wilson (1977) (adapted).
- 43 Hopkins (2010) uses, as I do, the term 'conversation' to describe personal relationship between the English poets and their classical interlocutors.
- 44 Quasimodo (1959) 17 f.: 'In questo dominio il poeta parla con la voce del sentimento della solitudine, e più volte ferma il suo accento sul verbo *parlare* mentre dura il colloquio col suo tempo ritrovato, con la morte'.
- 45 'Ed è subito sera', Quasimodo (1930), translation by Bevan (1983).
- 46 The description 'siculo greco' concludes the poem 'Mycenae', in Quasimodo (1958).
- 47 Bo (1938).
- 48 For an excellent analysis of those, see Capra (2008).
- 49 Published in Quasimodo (1956), translation by Bevan (1983).
- 50 The main ancient account is *Life of Aeschylus* (*TrGF* 3, T 1) 10. For a text and translation, as well as a discussion of this and other relevant ancient sources, see Burges Watson (2013).

- 51 In interpreting this poem, Capra (2008) 17 aptly quotes the beginning of Petrarch's sonnet:

Solo e pensoso i più deserti campi
vo misurando a passi tardi e lenti ...
Alone and pensive the desert fields
I measure, with slow and tarrying steps ...

- 52 Capra (2008) 17 f. convincingly argues that Aeschylus functions as a sort of *alter ego* for Quasimodo not just in this poem, but also more generally.
- 53 Quasimodo (1960) 73: 'Le parole dei cantori che abitarono le isole di fronte alla mia terra ritornarono lentamente nella mia voce, come contenuti eterni, dimenticati dai filologi ...' ('The words of the singers who lived on the islands facing my own land returned slowly to my voice, as eternal subjects forgotten by philologists ...')
- 54 His claims caused some exasperation among critics: see for example Bevilacqua (1976) 237.
- 55 The full text is available at [/www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1959/press.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1959/press.html).
- 56 Quasimodo himself made similar claims, see above n. 53.
- 57 Bloom (1975) 33.
- 58 D. Walcott's poem 'Homecoming: Anse la Raye' (1969) begins like this:

Whatever else we learned
at school, like solemn Afro-Greeks eager for grades,
of Helen and the shades
of borrowed ancestors,
there are no rites
for those who have returned.

For discussion see Davis (2007).

- 59 The relationship between 'tradition' and 'reception' as categories of analysis is yet to be fully explored, as Leonard (2009) 835 rightly points out.
- 60 This is the mission of the European Research Council-funded project *Living Poets: A New Approach to Ancient Poetry*, see <http://livingpoets.dur.ac.uk>.
- 61 Zajko 2006.
- 62 West (1973) 17.
- 63 Martindale (2013) 173.

CHAPTER 4

RECOGNIZING VIRGIL^{*}

ANDREW LAIRD

credimus? an qui amant, ipsi sibi somnia fingunt?

Virgil, *Eclogue* 8.108

Lascia parlare a me, ch' i'ho concetto
ciò che tu vuoi

Virgil's words to Dante, *Inferno* Canto 26.73–4

The idea of recognition can connote respect as well as identification based on previous encounters. When it comes to recognizing Virgil, deference to the poet is very evident in the practices and behaviour of his early readers, along with forms of personal recognition. The title of the present chapter is meant to hint at Virgil's stature, as well as to suggest that by taking a different route, we can see a different side to the poet we have known all along. This can be done by exploring the ways in which other Latin authors seem to regard Virgil as a constructed character in his own poetry. In other words, the aim here is to consider the importance of the poet's individual presence in the performance and reception of his work: Virgil's reception can be shown to be closely connected to constructions of his biography.

These considerations have been prompted by an apparent consensus between some earlier Roman responses to Virgil and the traditions of commentary on the poet from later in antiquity.¹ The earlier sources, which show an interest in the development of Virgil's work over time, often convey a strong sense of the poet's character. The later material presents Virgil as an instructor – of poetic technique, of rhetoric and sometimes of philosophy as well. He is regarded as someone who

composes to be heard as well as read. The role ascribed to the poet by his ancient readers amounts to a dramatic role.

It is still customary to treat the words of the *Georgics* as those of Virgil's individual *persona*, and some people still conceive of one or two speakers in the *Eclogues* as mouthpieces of the poet.² But the manner in which most readers today seem to approach the *Aeneid* is what gives the game away. The heroic epic is routinely regarded as presenting a window which looks directly on to the events, characters and historical concerns of the story. In spite of the extensive attention that has been paid to the speech of characters in the poem and to the 'empathy' and 'point of view' of its narrator, very little emphasis is placed on the fact that out of all the characters in the *Aeneid*, the one who is the most conspicuous to us is Virgil, the poet, whose speaking voice and whose language mediates to the audience the actions, speeches and everything else to be discerned in the text.³

The illustration of this thesis will be divided into three main parts. The first will describe briefly a pair of later Latin poems which involve Virgil: one by Petrarch and the other by a virtually unknown seventeenth-century author. Renaissance and early modern texts such as these spotlight some important ancient perceptions of the poet which modern readers no longer take so seriously. The next part will then sketch out those ancient views of Virgil's relation to his work, of Virgil's character and presence, and consider the dramatization of Virgil – even as a visible apparition. Then the third and final section will home in on a few texts from much closer to the poet's lifetime which could also incline us to recognize Virgil in a different way. The consistent picture to emerge from this sequence of *aperçus* from a variety of sources shows there is still further room for reflection about Virgil as a character in his own right.

I

In the later 1300s, Petrarch composed a series of Latin epistles to ancient Greek and Roman authors.⁴ In a letter penned to Virgil, Petrarch first asks the poet whether he is in the Christian heaven or in the pagan Underworld described in

Recognizing Virgil

the *Aeneid*. Petrarch next says that he is writing from Virgil's native Mantua and that he often wonders which meadows, groves, hills and banks were Virgil's own favourite spots:

Hic tibi composui que perlegis, otia nactus	40
Ruris amica tui, quonam vagus avia calle	
Fusca sequi, quibus in pratis errare soleres,	
Assidue mecum volvens, quam fluminis oram,	
Que curvi secreta lacus, quas arboris umbras,	
Quas nemorum latebras collisque sedilia parvi	45
Ambieris, cuius fessus seu cespitis herbam	
Presseris accubitu, seu ripam fontis ameni;	
Atque ea praesentem michi te spectacula reddunt.	
Petrarch, <i>Familiares</i> 24.11.40–8	

Here I have composed what you are reading, and have found the friendly repose of your countryside. I continuously go over with myself what path you would have followed, wandering to obscure retreats, in which meadows you used to roam, what shore of the river, which recesses of the curving lake, which shades of trees, which hidden parts of woods, which banks on a small hill you walked around, or the grass of which lawn you rested on when tired, or the bank of which pleasant stream. These sights bring your presence to me.

The locations passed over are poetic *topoi* or conventional motifs, but in his account of tracing Virgil's footsteps Petrararch's explicit emphasis is on recalling his personal presence.⁵

The end of the letter reassures Virgil that Tityrus, the shepherd from his *Eclogues*, is still blowing on a reed pipe, that the smallholding of the *Georgics* is thriving, and that Aeneas still lives, giving pleasure to people all over the world – but, at the same time, the fact that their creator is dead is constantly emphasized. It is curious that Petrarch's letters to other ancient authors such as Cicero, Quintilian and Horace do not draw anything like so much attention to those authors no longer being alive. But the very opening lines of this particular epistle bring Virgil's death to mind:

Clare Maro, tanta quem felix Mantua prole
Romanum genuisse decus per saecula gaudet
Petrarch, *Familiares* 24.11.2–3

Famous Maro, fortunate Mantua rejoices in bringing to life so great an offspring, a glory to Rome for centuries to come.

Those words echo the first words of the epitaph Virgil reputedly composed for himself: *Mantua me genuit*, ‘Mantua brought me to life’.

Petrarch’s final farewell comes all too abruptly after he reproaches Virgil for asking the *Aeneid* to be burnt when he was dying:

Arsurumque iterum pietas Augusta secundis
Eripuit flammis, quem non morientis amici
Deiecti movere animi, meritoque supremas
Contempsisse preces evo laudabitur omni.

Petrarch, *Familiares* 24.11.60–3

The piety of Augustus rescued [Aeneas] as he was again about to burn in a second set of flames. The dejected thoughts of a dying friend did not move Augustus and he will be rightly praised by every age for having defied your last request.

This praise lavished upon Augustus for preserving the *Aeneid* ends up eclipsing the credit due to its poet for composing the work in the first place. It is then that Petrarch signs off by asking Virgil to send his regards to the two Greek poets who were his principal models:

Eternum, dilecte, vale nostrosque rogatus
Meonium Ascreumque senes salvere iubeto.

Petrarch, *Familiares* 24.11.64–5

Farewell forever, beloved one, and, so bidden, greet our elders, Maeonian Homer and Ascrean Hesiod.

The second post-classical Latin poem, by Bartolomé Rosales, was published in 1680, in Mexico City. It is a short narrative of 200 verses, entitled *Aulica Musarum Synodus et Crisis Apollinea*, ‘The Academic Congregation of Muses and the Judgment of Apollo’, composed as a preface to a Virgilian cento by Bernardo Ceinos de Riofrío.⁶ Rosales’ poem begins with Mercury arriving at the abode of the Muses. Mercury has some important news to deliver to Apollo: he says he had a prophetic dream as he slept by a river, a dream in which a

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phantom spoke to him. The identity of the *praesens imago* (the image that appeared to Mercury) is obvious from the very first words it says:

En ego, qui quondam Latio monumenta reliqui,
Quique duces cecini, diri Phrygia agmina belli,
Tempora cui cinxit circum Parnasica laurus,
Quem totus miris extollit laudibus Orbis,
Quem decus ipsa suum veneratur Roma Maronem
Rosales, *Aulica Musarum Synodus* 84–8

I am he who once left monuments for Latium, and who sang of the leaders, of the Phrygian columns in grim war, I am he whose brow was crowned with the laurel of Parnassus, whom the whole world extols with wondrous praises, Maro, whom Rome itself reveres as its own glory.

The speaking phantom is none other than Virgil himself. The words *ego qui quondam* ('I am he who once') echo the first verse of the spurious preface to the *Aeneid*, and the phrase *duces cecini* ('I sang of leaders') is an excerpt from the same tomb inscription that Petrarch had also recalled. Virgil's ghost next tells Mercury that a boat has borne him to the land of the living from the waters of the Underworld. The poet wants Mercury to understand that this vision really is authentic – *fantem memet Virgilium* 'it is me, Virgil speaking' – now that he has risen again in the Americas:

Haud quidquam reputes aliud, quam carmina fantem
Memet Virgilium, cuius resonare Camaenam
Nunc iterum sic fata iuvant . . .
Nunc iterum toto celebrandus in Orbe Poeta
pulchrior exurgo, faciesque reficta refulget.
Nunc et in Orbe Novo resonat Romana Thalia
Quae redimita rosis Indis caput extulit undis.
Rosales, *Aulica Musarum Synodus* 104–6, 108–12

You should not deem it anything other than me, Virgil who is speaking these poems, now the fates help his Camena to sound again . . .

Now I rise again, more beautiful still, as a poet to be celebrated all over the world and my features, refashioned, shine once more. Now Roman Thalia sounds again in the New World as she has raised her head from the waters, garlanded with Indian roses.

After recounting all that in turn to Apollo, Mercury then explains that the tide of Latin poetry is now flowing down to Mexico and he offers an extra proof:

Carmina Virgilius sorberi iusserat igne:
Plotius, & Varus cinere eripuerè minaci Aeneidem . . .
Flammaque vanescat, vivat Maro clarus in Orbe
Si modo flumen adest, incendia nulla timemus
Flamma peribit aquis, compescet *frigidus amnis*
Nec sentire minas poterit iam Troja ruinae,
Nec querulas iterum cogetur reddere voces.
FRIGIDUS est *RIVUS*: superis date pocula grata
Aulica Musarum Synodus 128–30, 135–9

Virgil had ordered his poems to be consumed by fire: Plotius and Varus snatched the *Aeneid* from the dangerous embers . . . May the flame vanish and let Maro live renowned in the world: as long as a river is nearby we fear no fires. The flame will perish in its waters; the *cold river* will hold it in check. Troy will no longer be able to feel the threat of falling, nor will it ever be made to give forth laments again. *COLD* is the *STREAM*: offer thankful cups to the gods.

Mercury ends his speech with an appeal for the river to be honoured. Apollo, after consulting the Muses, agrees that the cold river of verse which bears Virgil in its waters should indeed be celebrated. *Frigidus est rivus* is a thinly veiled reference to the name of Rosales' contemporary, the Virgilian centonist Bernardo Ceinos de Riofrío (the words *rio frío* mean 'cold river' in Spanish).⁷

The two poems just outlined are separated by three centuries and they were conceived with very different ends in view. Petrarch was self-consciously displaying his credentials as a humanist scholar, while Rosales wanted to show how classical learning had begun to flourish in the viceroyalty of New Spain. Both these authors spearheaded, in their respective countries, a boom in the writing of pastoral, didactic and epic poetry. They knew first-hand that Latin poetry can be composed on an ambitious scale. That explains why their take on Virgil is different from our own. And even though these texts are fictional, the features they have in common turn out to provide some useful insights:

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- (i) Both poets rehearse the tradition that the *Aeneid* survived in spite of the author's wish to destroy it. Petrarch had also contrasted the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, which still live on, with their creator who does not – before he reproached Virgil for trying to consign his epic to the flames. Bartolomé Rosales draws a similar contrast when he has Mercury say '*Virgil* had ordered his verses to be consumed by fire' and next 'let *Maro* live renowned in the world'.
- (ii) Each poet dramatizes Virgil, either as a speaker or as an addressee, and his presence is also an issue in both texts. The sights of the north Italian countryside render Virgil 'present', *praesentem*, to Petrarch in verse 50 of his epistle, while Rosales has Virgil appear as a 'present image', *praesens imago*, in verse 81 and in other verses of *Aulica Synodus Musarum*.
- (iii) Both poets lay particular emphasis on Virgil being dead, and what is more, on the idea that he inhabits the very Underworld which his own poetry had portrayed.

Those very issues also come to the fore in many other early modern Latin commentators and poets and a number of ancient classical authors shared the same preoccupations. The next part of this discussion will treat in turn the significance of Virgil's attempt to burn the *Aeneid*; the dramatization of his presence by ancient readers; and his re-emergence from the world below. These apparently separate issues will turn out to be intimately connected with each other.

II

(i) The story of Virgil's deathbed wish to destroy his work is told most graphically in Suetonius' life of Virgil.⁸ Although the story can hardly be true, it had currency in later antiquity and it was the subject of a number of declamations and minor poems. Suetonius had quoted as his source an elegy on the theme attributed to Sulpicius of Carthage, and ancient verse pastiches of Gallus and

Augustus also survive, in which these renowned individuals plead with Virgil to save his epic.⁹ The importance of the tradition that Virgil wanted to burn the *Aeneid* really lies in some burning questions it raises – about the relation between Virgil the author on the one hand, and his corpus of poetry on the other. The implications of the poet's request to incinerate his masterpiece are very important for the development of literary interpretation in general. The story can be regarded as a sort of parable which can be interpreted in more than one way.

(a) The literal meaning is one on which Virgil's critics have frequently depended. The story tells us that the *Aeneid* is imperfect, if only because it was incomplete. This eventually led to attempts by Latin poets to 'finish' the *Aeneid* by tacking on new endings which they wrote themselves. But there is a more common way of setting Virgil right. As early as the first century AD the philosopher Favorinus was bold enough to identify the verses about Mount Etna in Book 3 of the *Aeneid* as one of the passages that needed revising and correction, confident as he was in his knowledge that the poet had not been able to polish and refine his poem completely.¹⁰ Suetonius follows his account of the incomplete state of the *Aeneid* by listing first the Roman grammarians who tried to correct or improve Virgil's text, and then those who sought to point out his more general defects. Even in our own time, scholars have sought to make corrective judgements, not just on the handful of incomplete verses, but also on certain lines or passages of their own choosing. In short, the idea that Virgil was unsure of his epic can encourage more critical verdicts of his poetry. The idea reassures people that, though Virgil was a great poet, he had limits to his capacities.

(b) The other way of understanding the story has a more profound significance for literary criticism and literary history. The possibility that Virgil wanted his epic to be destroyed could show us that what the poet wants is not always what is best for the poem. In continuing to preserve and read the *Aeneid* we are disregarding the poet's wishes. Or,

to present this another way, the *Aeneid* has a life of its own which its poet would have denied. In that sense it is more ours than his, more the property of the reader than the author. By disregarding the mortal Virgil's wishes, one can create an *immortal* Virgil whose words have different messages for different people in different times. Other things can be created too: poetry modelled on Virgil, 'pseudepigraphic' poetry which parodies or fakes Virgil (as we find in the *Appendix Virgiliana*) and even centos.¹¹ The cento emerged in the first century AD: verses or half-verses of Virgil's poetry were rearranged and stitched together to make a new text which had a new theme of its own. To produce such a composition must surely be the most decisive way of disregarding the wishes of the late Publius Vergilius Maro.

The idea that readers have more rights than authors, or that poems are more important than poets, could well arise from reflecting on the story that the dying poet wanted to burn the *Aeneid*. And that idea would be all the more likely to arise among devotees of Virgil who considered that story to be true.

(ii) The next general issue identified here – the emphasis on, or a kind of desire for, the poet's presence – eases the tension between Virgil the author and 'Virgil' the body of texts. The texts can themselves be used to reconstruct an idea, or a dramatic *re*-presentation of the author who wrote them. It may seem obvious that the poet, as he is apprehended through his works, is a speaking character with individual qualities. But properly taking on board the conception of Virgil as a *constant* dramatized presence can help to make some ancient responses to his work look much less puzzling or irrelevant.

Modern readers are often daunted or repelled by Virgil's early critics. They are confronted by a Scylla and Charybdis: grammatical-rhetorical interpretation on the one side and allegorical criticism on the other. But these general approaches to Virgil's poetry make more sense if it is understood that presuppositions about the centrality of the poet's role underlie them both. Tiberius Claudius Donatus made this very explicit for

rhetorical criticism in his ever unpopular commentary on the *Aeneid*. He called the poem 'a most ample rhetorical treatise' and considered the poet's main purpose was to provide an encomium of Aeneas.¹² Aeneas, though, was not the only one to benefit from Virgil's oratorical expertise: in a comment on *Aeneid* 6.24 describing Pasiphae's passion for the Cretan bull which led to the birth of the Minotaur, Donatus showed how successful Virgil was at exonerating the bull from any blame!¹³ Overall though, there is no doubt that the 1,200 pages of Donatus' fourth-century commentary gave Virgil the starring role. The same assumption about the poet's priority was also made by the speakers in Macrobius' dialogue, the *Saturnalia* (written in the same period), just as it was by Quintilian three centuries before.¹⁴ When all these authorities agreed that Virgil should be counted as an orator no less than as a poet, they were thinking more about his discourse as a whole than about the speeches he ascribed to his characters – while modern critics concerned with rhetoric in the *Aeneid*, on the other hand, are mainly interested in those embedded speeches.

But even if those late antique commentators had chosen to address Virgil as a poet instead of as an orator, Virgil's style, diction and voice would still have been put centre-stage – not his characters, his stories or his general message. That is roughly what the famous commentary of Servius does: its principal object of attention is the poet. The glosses, or explanations, of Virgil's language in Servius exhibit a determination to reach the character of Virgil by recognizing the individuality and the quality of the poet's expression. All those notes in the Servian corpus about Roman religion, myth and history also reflect the same inclination: to understand and appreciate what it was that Virgil himself meant to say.¹⁵ Don Fowler pointed out that Servius comments on what is now conceived as 'narrative technique' and gives extensive consideration to *persona*, a word which refers us straight back to the character of the poet.¹⁶ Allegorical interpreters of Virgil in late antiquity also strove to recognize, or at least to construct, the character of the poet they addressed – for all that they are now regularly accused of imposing alien, anachronistic meanings on to his text. For instance,

Fulgentius' allegorical commentary on the *Aeneid* was presented as a dramatic dialogue in which the ghost of Virgil explained his own work: Fulgentius himself was only relaying these moral and philosophical interpretations to his readers.

The Scylla and Charybdis of early Virgilian interpretation end up looking rather similar. Neither approach primarily presents Virgil's content in the ways it is currently regarded today: as political literature in the form of a third-person fiction. Both approaches instead take us to the presence of Virgil, whose voice is directly heard. His own voice, whether it is seen to belong to an orator or to a philosopher, is heard in the way that he uses words and figures. The rhetoricians were concerned with the ways in which Virgil deploys those words and figures; the allegorists sought to uncover the meanings lurking behind them.

The poet's presence, dramatized in the poems about Virgil at the opening, may at first seem to be quite different from the poet's voice which is generally equated with the voice of the narrator. But the emphasis Virgil's earlier readers have placed on him being dead – the issue remaining for this second part of the discussion – should show that the most palpable conceptions of Virgil's presence, which involve phantom apparitions, might be on a continuum with more routine ways of reading or hearing the poet.

(iii) Even if too much has been made of W.F. Jackson Knight's attempts to consult Virgil through a psychic medium, the involvement of Virgil's ghost with the reception and exegesis of his poetry has been an enduring one.¹⁷ Long before Dante, Latin writers played on the idea of Virgil inhabiting the Underworld of his own invention and occasionally coming back to haunt them. That has to be due to the powerful account of the Underworld in Book 6 of the *Aeneid* which received special attention from Roman poets after Virgil, as well as from all the commentators already mentioned. Scholars of the classical tradition have given the enduring impact of *Aeneid* 6 ample coverage; here it is worth just considering the effect of an exemplary passage, in which Virgil explicitly invokes the shades of the dead to reveal hidden knowledge:

Di, quibus imperium est animarum, umbraeque silentes
et Chaos et Phlegethon, loca nocte tacentia late,
sit mihi fas audita loqui, sit numine vestro
pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas.

Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.264–7

You gods who hold power over the spirits, you silent shades, and Chaos and Phlegethon, you places silent far in the night, let it be lawful to speak what I have heard, let it be granted by your power to reveal things hidden deep in the darkness of the earth.

This is an example of ‘sciomancy’, the less gruesome alternative to necromancy as a way of talking of the dead or securing a passport to the realms below. Servius defines sciomancy as *umbrae evocatio*, ‘the evocation of a shade’.¹⁸ That is exactly what the poet is doing in this passage, in his own voice. These verses naturally confirmed early readers in their belief that there were deeper levels of occult meaning in Virgil’s poetry: the matter must have been further complicated in later antiquity when the word *umbra* could mean ‘allegory’ as well as ‘shadow’ or ‘shade’.¹⁹

Virgil’s evocation of the shades influenced Fulgentius, who copies the poet’s own style of sciomancy in order to call up the *persona* of Virgil himself for his verse to be elucidated:

Cede mihi nunc personam Mantuani uatis, quo fugitios eius in lucem deducamus amfractus. Nam ecce ad me etiam ipse Ascrei fontis bractamento saturior aduenit. (Fulgentius, *Expositio* 85 (ed. Helm))

Send me now the Mantuan Bard in person, so that I can bring his fugitive meanings to light. And behold, he himself comes towards me well filled with a draught of the Ascrean spring.

Fulgentius is not only interpreting the mysteries of Book 6: he is also practising them. The image of Virgil immediately appears, this author tells us, ‘just as images of bards are accustomed to, with his tablets taken up in order to finish his work, and with a fixed frown, he murmurs some mysterious truth’ (*quales uatum imagines solent, dum assumptis ad opus conficiendum tabulis stupida fronte arcanum quiddam submurmurat*). The boundary here between *hocus pocus* and

the business of extracting Virgil's meaning is not as secure as we might like it to be.

The images and shades of Virgil in the Latin writing of late antiquity could be dismissed as a poetic convention that got out of control. But these apparitions might instead be regarded as a perfectly natural way of recognizing Virgil. The visions of the poet suggest that what we routinely call 'the poet's voice' was being equated with a dramatic sense of the poet's presence. And those visions can actually be rationalized and better understood in terms of the practices of reading that were prevalent in antiquity. The best source for those ancient practices is Saint Augustine, whose writings tell us far more about the psychology and experience of reading than classical critics and rhetoricians do.²⁰ Augustine approached reading through a theory of signs which was modelled on oral communication: with a conception of the relationship between sender, receiver and sign. Reading can be seen as comparable to interpersonal communication (though the reader himself sets it up) – and reading can provide an individual with a kind of information equivalent to that offered by sense perception. In *De Trinitate*, for example, Augustine explains that anyone reading or listening to the writings of St Paul is bound to draw a picture in his mind of the Apostle himself which may or may not correspond to the features and figures formed in the minds of other readers:

Necesse est autem cum aliqua corporalia lecta uel audita quae non uidimus credimus, fingat sibi animus aliquid in lineamentis formisque corporum sicut occurrerit cogitanti, quod aut uerum non sit aut etiam si uerum est, quod rarissime potest accipere, non hoc tamen fide ut teneamus quidquam prodest, sed ad aliud aliquid utile quod per hoc insinuat. Quis enim legentium uel audientium quae scripsit apostolus Paulus uel quae de illo scripta sunt non fingat animo et ipsius apostoli faciem et omnium quorum ibi nomina commemorantur? Et cum in tanta hominum multitudine quibus illae litterae notae sunt alius aliter lineamenta figuramque illorum corporum cogitet, quis propinquius et similis cogitet utique incertum est. (Augustine, *De Trinitate* 8.4.7)

When we consider any corporeal things, of which we have read or heard but which we have not seen, it is inevitable then that our mind fashions them for itself as something with bodily features and forms, just as it occurred to our thoughts. Now this image is either false or true; even if it is true, which can

be admitted very rarely, still there is no use in clinging to it by faith, but it is useful for some other purpose which is intimidated by means of it. For who among those reading or hearing what Paul wrote, or things that were written about him, does not fashion in his mind features of the apostle himself and of all those whose names are there mentioned? And since in the large number of people to whom those writings are known, one represents the features and figures of those bodies in one way, and another in a different way, it is assuredly uncertain whose thoughts are closer to and more like the reality.

Augustine's psychology of meditative reading was connected to 'mnemotechnics', the art of memory in classical rhetoric which laid considerable emphasis on visualization. Augustine had the idea that formation of a salient mental picture of an author was a standard consequence of apprehension through *reading*. This provides a better understanding of why visual images of Virgil appeared to his readers.

The next passage might be a report of precisely this process. It is an excerpt from a letter about linguistic usage by a ninth-century Christian author, Ermenrich of Ellwangen.²¹ But this writer digresses to describe how he has frequent visions of Virgil. Significantly, these visions are not something he welcomes:

Nolo tamen ipsum uidere, quem credo in pessimo loco manere, et quia terret me uisus eius. Saepe uero quando *legebam* illum, et post *lectionem* capiti subponebam, in primo sopore, qui post laborem solet esse dulcissimus, statim affuit monstrum quoddam fuscum, et per omnia horribile, interdum gestabat *codicem*, interdum *calamum* ad aures, ueluti *scripturus* aliquid, ridebat ad me, uel, quia dicta eius *legebam*, irridebat me. Ast ego euigilans, signabam me signaculo crucis, *librum* eius longaeque proiciens iterum membra dedi quieti. (*Epistula Ermenrici* (ed. Dummmler) 561–2)

I don't want to see Virgil, whom I believe to be in a very bad place, and besides the sight of him terrifies me. Often, when I was *reading* him, and after *reading* put him under my head, in that first sleep which should be sweetest after toil, there immediately appeared before me a dark monster, dreadful in every aspect. Sometimes it was brandishing a *codex*, other times with a *pen* behind its ear as one about to *write*, it was either laughing at me, or, because *I was reading* his words, it was mocking me. But waking up, I signed myself with a sign of the cross, and hurling his book far away, again gave my limbs to sleep.

The density of references to reading is obviously meant to signal something: Ermenrich makes it clear that it is after he has been reading, and reading Virgil in particular, that the apparition presents itself. It is also worth noting that the figure appearing to Ermenrich brandishes writing materials. The *persona* of Virgil also came to Fulgentius equipped with stationery (*quales uatum imagines solent*, ‘just as the images of bards are accustomed to’). The tablets, codex and pen convey that a *sender*, as well as a receiver, is in line with the Augustinian model of reading as an interpersonal relationship. The point is that reading might be leading to a form of voluntary or involuntary ‘sciomancy’. It is obviously involuntary in the case of the unfortunate Ermenrich. Though the style of his letter as a whole may recall the rhetorical narrative of Augustine’s *Confessions*, he still cannot help importing some of Virgil’s phrases, even as he puts the poet down.

It is revealing that Ermenrich’s dreams do not focus on any of the phantasmic creations to be found in the corpus of Virgil’s poetry: Allecto, for example, or the Cyclops, or the Harpies or tree-roots oozing blood. All those are creations which could be the stuff of nightmares for readers today. Instead Ermenrich’s dreams focus on the character of Virgil himself. This seems strange – like someone who goes to see a horror film then having nightmares about the director. But the specific nature of Ermenrich’s visualization is more in line with Augustinian psychology than our own. Ermenrich of Ellwangen, who is neither an allegorist nor a rhetorical interpreter, shows that a salient impression of the poet’s presence is what arises, first and foremost, from his reading of Virgil.

Before proceeding to the final part of this chapter, it is worth summarizing what has emerged from the texts surveyed so far. Early modern Latin authors, who produced poetry of their own in a Virgilian style, recognized the importance of the construction of Virgil’s *persona* in antiquity and the tensions implicit in it. The late antique traditions of Latin criticism and commentary, though they differed in their objectives, shared a construction of Virgil’s character – a construction which led to what we call the ‘poet’s voice’ being conjoined with a more

vivid impression of the poet's presence. Moreover, the reflections on the apocryphal story of the dying poet's desire to burn the *Aeneid* also dovetail with the conception just now outlined of a poet who continued to speak to his readers through his work – and who even, if certain contemplative forms of reading were involved, could appear to them as well.

Such ancient intimations of the 'death of the author' are not news: immortality conferred on a poet after his death and the loss of authorial control once a text is published are very familiar ideas in Roman literature. The idea that writing itself, whether on monuments or in texts, has a commemorative function was always present in Roman culture: Quintilian famously observed that 'letters serve as guardians of voices, returning them to readers as something once deposited'.²² Secondly, performance traditions outside Rome provide parallels for the resurrection of the poet's voice: in archaic Greek poetry, the notion of the poet as a 'performer' recreated in the *enactment* of performance is very prevalent, while in troubadour poetry the distinction between composer and performer often seems to melt away altogether.²³

The situations and means through which classical Latin poetry was preserved and extended, from one age to another, are different from those in early Greece or medieval France, but not completely different. For instance, centos recycling Virgilian verses represent formulaic compositions which are rooted in a well-known text, if not in common memory.²⁴ But are there any specific sources from closer to Virgil's time that might have led to the later sense of the poet's centrality as a constructed character in his own work? Might the poet himself be inadvertently responsible for his presence being dramatized or even actualized as a visible image which came to his readers from the world below?

III

The 'Incipit' (*VSD* 42), added to the beginning of Virgil's epic probably not too long after it was composed, may lead to an answer:²⁵

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ille (A) ego qui quondam (B) gracili modulatus avena
carmen, et egressus silvis (C) vicina coegi (D)
ut quamvis avido parerent arva (D) colono
gratum opus agricolis, at nunc horrentia Martis (E)

I [am] that man (A) who once (B) in a pastoral strain, composed
poetry and coming from the woods (C) compelled neighbouring
fields (D) to obey their owner, however demanding.
A work pleasant for farmers, but now of Mars's (E) bristling.

The fact that someone other than Virgil wrote these lines does not mean they should be disregarded altogether. In five centuries of debate about the authorship of these verses, no one seems to have noticed something rather important – underlined and marked here with the letters A–E. Those capital letters mark significant parallels of theme, diction, syntax and word-order between these verses and the standard opening of the *Aeneid* into which they lead:

Arma uirumque cano (A), Troiae qui primus (B) ab
oris (C)
Italiam fato profugus Lauiniaque uenit
Litora (D), multum ille (A) et terris iactatus et alto
ui superum, saeuae memorem Iunonis ob iram (E).

arms I sing and the man (A) who first (B) from Troy's shores (C)
as an exile by fate came to Italy and the Lavinian
shores (D), that man (A) much tossed over the earth and the deep
by the heavens' might, through cruel Juno's unforgetting anger (E).

The letter E marks the nice correspondence of Mars to Juno at the end of the two sets of lines, but the parallel marked B – between *qui quondam* and *qui primus* – is what best draws attention to the principal association (A). That association is between the poet and the hero of the poem. The association is further underlined by C and D, the changes of location to which both hero and poet are subject: the poet moves from the woods to the fields of the *Georgics*; the hero goes from Troy to the Lavinian shores.

Even if the suggestion of a parallel between Virgil and Aeneas is left aside, accommodation of the Incipit would turn the *Aeneid's* narrator into a distinctive speaking character. The

Incipit is much more than an optional preface that could precede the text to follow; it also functions as a frame for that text, telling us officially or unofficially that the speaker of the *Aeneid* is male (there are no other indications of that in the epic to follow), and it tells us that this speaker was also the singer of the *Georgics* and *Eclogues*. In short, it is no other *persona* but the author himself, Virgil, whom we hear speaking to us.

Just as importantly, the Incipit comments on, or even recommends, how the poem is to be read and received: the narrative to follow becomes embedded in the speech of the poet whose presence is dramatized. This has implications for how we, and readers in the past, might conceive of the *Aeneid* in performance. The words of the speaking poet then become far more vivid than those of any of the personages he introduces – indeed *introductae personae*, ‘persons brought on’ is the very expression Servius uses for characters in Virgil’s works other than the poet himself. There are comparable performative effects in other ancient texts: Socrates is present to narrate some of the Platonic dialogues in which he takes part; in Lycophron’s *Alexandra* it is Cassandra who sings of the fall of Troy, the wanderings of Aeneas and the Trojans and the struggling between Europe and Asia, which led to the supremacy of Rome.²⁶

The main point, however, is that acceptance of this Incipit would have confirmed, or even prompted, the inclination of readers to see Virgil as a constant dramatized presence, to hear Virgil’s voice uninterrupted from one work to the next. While the second word in the *Aeneid*, *cano* (‘I sing’) might alone be enough to confirm or inspire that inclination to regard the poem as the sustained monologue of an individual, the contested verses, if added, considerably amplify that effect.

The spurious Incipit could date back to the last few years of the first century BC. One of its original functions may have been to canonize the *Eclogues*, *Georgics* and *Aeneid* as genuine works of the poet. Those verses have much in common with my second early source, the famous tomb inscription, also attributed to Virgil, which was echoed both by Petrarch and by Rosales:

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Mantua me genuit, Calabri rapuere, tenet nunc
Parthenope; cecini pascua rura duces.
VSD 36

Mantua brought me to life, Calabria snatched me away,
Now Parthenope holds me: I sang of pastures, farms, leaders.

Again, as in the Incipit, the *Eclogues*, *Georgics* and *Aeneid* are referred to in the sequence in which they were written. Again, the suggestive power of topography is used to evoke the poet's identity and to plot his biographical trajectory, but this time we have the names of specific places: Mantua, Calabria, Parthenope. The naming of the last two places shows that this epitaph cannot be the work of a mortal Virgil: the poet would otherwise have needed truly clairvoyant powers to know that his death would be in Calabria and his burial at Parthenope. The retrospective knowledge about his own death and burial which is put into the poet's mouth enhances a paradox which is a feature of epitaphs: they present the words of someone who is no longer there to speak.

An epitaph like this might help to account for the emphasis on Virgil in particular speaking as a dead poet, but that idea could also have been fuelled by the Incipit to the *Aeneid*. As well as sharing stylistic features with this epitaph, that appendable opening to the *Aeneid* has a haunting, funereal quality of its own. Actual tomb inscriptions which begin with *Ille ego* are post-Virgilian, but they do at least show that the tone of the Incipit could appropriately be transferred to a funerary context.²⁷

Such a colouring on Virgil's own discourse would reflect the occasional epitaphic tinge the poet gives to the words of his characters. The first-person obituary Dido pronounces on herself at the end of Book 4 is one striking example. Fraenkel remarked on the 'lapidary' quality of this passage, comparing it to inscriptions on the tombs of the Scipios.²⁸ But such a lapidary quality can also be found in the ancient literary convention of the *sphragis* or 'seal'. This is a 'signature passage' with which a poet formally closes a poem or group of poems, asserting his authorship and authority as he does so.

The final lines of Virgil's fourth *Georgic* are a famous example of such a device:

Haec super aruorum cultu pecorumque canebar
 et super arboribus, Caesar dum magnus ad altum 560
 fulminat Euphraten bello uictorque uolentis
 per populos dat iura uiamque adfectat Olympo.
 illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat
 Parthenope, studiis florentem ignobilis oti,
 carmina qui lusi pastorum audaxque iuuenta, 565
 Tityre, te patulae cecini sub tegmine fagi.
 Virgil, *Georgics* 4.559–66

Thus of the care of fields, of cattle, and of trees I sang, while great Caesar thundered in war near the deep Euphrates and while he, as a conqueror giving laws to willing peoples, made his way to Olympus. At that time sweet Parthenope was nursing me, Virgil, flowering in the pursuits of unimpressive recreation; I played the songs of shepherds, and boldly in my youth sang of you, Tityrus, under the cover of a shady beech.

We see nothing funereal or epitaphic here, mainly because we know full well that Virgil went on to write the *Aeneid*. If, however, the *Georgics* had been Virgil's last work, some people might well be arguing Virgil did *not* write this signature piece. This passage has been deemed 'a blatant misrepresentation of the poem it purports to epitomise'.²⁹ As things are, both the Incipit to the *Aeneid* and the tomb inscription for Virgil were doubtless inspired by this *sphragis*, especially the tomb inscription, given the recurrence of *Parthenope*, a word not found elsewhere in Virgil.

The writers of those apocryphal texts might well have been excavating, bringing to the surface, an epitaphic significance they saw already lurking in these closing lines of *Georgic* 4. In any case, the existence of those paratexts could have led to a perception that the *sphragis* did have such an epitaphic significance in the minds of subsequent readers. It is worth considering the effect these final verses of the *Georgics* would have in a recitation of the poem after Virgil's death, once Octavian's triumphal progress through the East had become a historical memory. The utterance of verse 563:

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illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat
Parthenope

At that time it was me, Virgil, sweet Parthenope was nursing

would represent a point at which the distinction between Virgil the poet and anyone reciting these lines would be very pronounced. At that point the independent identity of whoever recited the lines would be affirmed and the absence of the original poet himself, who is lost forever, would become most acute.³⁰ Indeed the sounding of Virgil's name makes Virgil's dramatic absence more conspicuous than it is at any other point in the *Eclogues*, *Georgics* or *Aeneid*. It may be no accident that this verse is echoed seventeen centuries later, when the character of Virgil announces his presence to inaugurate the rise of Latin poetry in the New World.

The close of the *Georgics* is by no means the only passage in Virgil which invites reflection on reception and performance; another example would be the address to Nisus and Euryalus in *Aeneid* 9.³¹ There, the poet speaks of the power of his poetry to confer immortality, as he aligns his verses to the permanence of the Capitoline rock. Just as when one considers the claims Horace makes for the enduring monumentality of his work in *Odes* 3.30, it is impossible to escape having an awkward realization: we are bound to note, even if only for a moment, that the person who made those claims is indeed long gone.

The last text I want to look at is very different, but it may have something to do with the peculiar emphasis among later writers on Virgil's status as a poet who is dead – and it may even have something to do with the enduring interest in invoking, addressing or even visualizing the presence of the poet.

It is likely that Horace published his fourth book of *Odes* some six years after Virgil was supposedly buried in Naples. Just as Horace's first collection of lyrics had begun with poems addressed to Maecenas, Augustus and Virgil, so this final book is closed with odes which are addressed to Maecenas, Virgil and

Augustus. It is *Ode* 4.12, which involves Virgil.³² The theme of the first half of the poem is the return of spring, but in spite of the light metrical rhythm this standard theme is treated in a measured and rather solemn way: the opening stanza describes the new season's effect on the winds, sea, land and rivers; the second presents a swallow building her nest, although she is in mourning for her son Itys. The third block of verses brings in a cameo from Virgil's *Eclogues*: shepherds are tending their sheep on the spring grass and singing songs with a reed pipe in honour of Pan. It is in the pivotal fourth stanza that Virgil is addressed:

adduxere sitim tempora, Vergili.
sed pressum Calibus ducere Liberum
si gestis, iuvenum nobilium cliens,
nardo vina merebere.

Horace, *Odes* 4.12.13–16

The seasons have brought on thirst, Virgil. But if you are keen to draw on the god of wine, pressed in Calabria, you as a client of the young nobility, will pay for the wine with nard.

Horace goes on to ask Virgil, more specifically for an onyx jar of nard:

nardi parvus onyx eliciet cadum,
qui nunc Sulpiciis accubat horreis,
spes donare novas largus amaraque
curarum eluere efficax.

Horace, *Odes* 4.12.17–20

A little onyx of nard will ease out the jar which now lies in Sulpicius' cellars, lavish in giving new hopes and effective in dispelling the bitterness of cares.

The onyx of nard, used in Roman funeral ritual, was associated with the world of the dead.³³ That makes it clear why this is the currency Horace's addressee is expected to use. Horace is in fact the first writer to think of staging an appearance of the dead Virgil – he wants to replay the familiarity they once enjoyed. This attempt to reprise his own bantering tone in their lost exchanges, which has perplexed some critics, shows how Quintilian's remark quoted earlier that 'letters serve as guardians

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of voices' can have quite another kind of application. This invocation or evocation of Virgil is different from the others we have seen, partly because we know Horace feels the lack of the poet's presence not just as a reader, but as a friend. The closing lines of this nostalgic but quietly optimistic poem are more of a self-address. They show the touching complex of ways in which Horace accommodates Virgil's absence:

verum pone moras et studium lucri
nigrorumque memor, dum licet, ignium
misce stultitiam consilii breuem:
dulce est desipere in loco.

Horace, *Odes* 4.11.25–8

But now postpone delay and desire for gain, remember
the black fires of death and while it is granted,
incorporate some short-lived foolishness into life's
counsels: 'unwisdom is sweet in its place'.

The status and effective divinity ascribed to Virgil by some imperial Roman authors may have had a bearing on the visions of the poet found in later Latin writers.³⁴ The end of *Eclogue* 8, quoted in the first epigraph to this chapter, suggests that 'those who love might fashion dreams for themselves'. For those who claim to love Virgil, a sense of the poet's presence is actually essential for a fuller appreciation of his achievement. The *Eclogues*, *Georgics* and *Aeneid* are representations of pastoral, heroic and historical worlds, but they also constitute a representation of the poet's character, as an autographic imprint of Virgil himself.

Notes

- * Elements of this chapter were first presented as a Don Fowler Memorial Lecture at the University of Oxford; a shorter text for the 2009 'Reading Authors' Lives' seminar in Ljubljana was published online in *Centopagine*; there have been additions in the light of comments by Niklas Holzberg and the 2010 'Creative Lives' seminar in Cambridge. This chapter is fondly dedicated to the memory of Don Fowler, a friend and mentor whose work will continue to be provocative, salutary and inspirational for classical studies and every area of the humanities.

- 1 Ziolkowski and Putnam (2008).
- 2 Korenjak (2003). Anna Uhlig, Chapter 5 also considers the biographical determinations of *persona*.
- 3 Highet (1972), Feeney (1983) and Laird (1999) 199–205 treat speech in the *Aeneid*; accounts of *Empfindung* and point of view in Heinze (1993), Otis (1964) and others are surveyed in the foundational account of focalization in Fowler (1990) 58–9.
- 4 For Petrarch's letters to Homer see Barbara Graziosi, Chapter 3, section on 'Petrarch and Homer'.
- 5 On this epistle and Virgil's emulation of Petrarch, see further Laird (2010).
- 6 Riofrío (1680). The modern edition in Peñalosa (1987) 198–218 does not contain Rosales' introductory poem. For the cento, see below with n. 11.
- 7 Laird (2007) on Riofrío (1680).
- 8 Virgilian *Vita* of Suetonius and Donatus [= *VSD*] 36–41.
- 9 *Anth.* (ed. Riese) 242 and 672 are pleas attributed to Cornelius Gallus and Augustus, respectively.
- 10 Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 17.10.1–10; compare *VSD* 42.
- 11 For pseudepigraphy and the cento see respectively Peirano (2012) and McGill (2005).
- 12 Tiberius Claudius Donatus, *Proem.* 2.10, cf. 2.455 (30); 456 (1).
- 13 Marshall (1997) 9–10.
- 14 Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 5.1.1: *Vergilium non minus oratorem quam poetam habendum, in quo et tanta orandi disciplina etiam diligens observatio rhetoricae artis ostenderetur* ('Virgil should be regarded as an orator no less than a poet, as he displays such great accomplishment in speaking as well as keen attention to the art of rhetoric'). There are around a hundred quotations from Virgil in Quintilian *Institutio oratoria*: the verdict in 10.185–6 speaks to the poet's oratorical eminence. See also Servius' preface to the commentary on the *Aeneid*.
- 15 In the Servian corpus there are only 183 comments of a strictly allegorical nature, a small proportion of the whole: Jones (1961).
- 16 Fowler (1997) 75–6.
- 17 Wilson Knight (1975); Wiseman (1992) 172–209.
- 18 Servius on *Aeneid* 6.149; Wilson-Okamura (2010) 158–9.
- 19 Dawson (1999).
- 20 Stock (1996).
- 21 Parts of Ermenrich's letter are translated in Waddell (1932) 18–19 and excerpted in Ziolkowski and Putnam (2008) 102–5. The full Latin text is in Dümmler (1898) 534–79.
- 22 Quintilian 1.7.31.
- 23 Zumthor (1987); Nagy (1996) 207–25.

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- 24 McGill (2005).
- 25 Horsfall (2000) 24 and 300; Mondin (2007).
- 26 Horsfall (1991).
- 27 *Ille ego Pannoniis quondam notissimus oris* ('I am he who was once famous about the Pannonian shores') is the opening of a second century epitaph discussed by Lattimore (1942) 288; compare Walther (1959), s.v. *ille ego*.
- 28 Fraenkel (1957).
- 29 Morgan (1999) 214.
- 30 Nagy (1996) 207–25.
- 31 Fowler (2000).
- 32 Thomas (2011) 225–8 on *Odes* 4.12.
- 33 Compare Horace, *Odes* 2.11.16, *Assyria nardus* 'Syrian nard' and Nisbet and Hubbard (1978) *ad loc.*; compare Propertius 2.13.30: *cum dabitur Syrio munere plenus onyx* (of nard in a funereal context).
- 34 Pliny, *Epistulae* 3.7 and Martial 11.48.50 on Silius' veneration of Virgil; compare Suetonius' life of Lucan. See further Crome (1963) and Hardie (1993).

PART III

LIVES IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

CHAPTER 5

A POETIC POSSESSION: PINDAR'S *LIVES* OF THE POETS

ANNA UHLIG

What does it mean to write a life? For most of us, our initial tendency is to conceive of biography in terms of genre. We look, with Momigliano, for 'an account of the life of a man from birth to death'.¹ But Aristotle's insight that the full span of a single life is not the only, or best, means of achieving a totality is no less relevant to the study of biography than to the epics about which the judgement was originally conceived.² The form of a biography is as important as the content narrated therein; it puts forth an implicit definition of the idea of a 'life'. In the creative spirit of this volume's title, we would do well to broaden the category of ancient biography to include less traditional forms of life writing. Here I present my case for doing so in the form of one very particular example: I propose the great fifth-century lyric poet Pindar for inclusion among the ranks of ancient biographers.

Recent years have seen a welcome broadening of our approach to life writing in the ancient world. As we have moved away from judgements based on rigid historical criteria, we have come to appreciate the creativity and literary insight that helped to shape the many poetic *bioi* that have been preserved alongside the texts from which they stem and which they were designed to illuminate.³ Guided by the work of Fairweather, Lefkowitz and Graziosi, we have come to view the ancient *bioi* as records of a rich literary-critical history that has, for the most part, been lost to us. In presenting us with poetic lives, the writers of the *bioi* offer a special type of literary analysis: biographical interpretation. Modern students of Pindar have much to learn from the insightful analysis of his ancient biographers, and

attention to the seemingly peculiar aspects of the tradition can serve as a welcome corrective to modern conventional wisdom. Pindar's early success in Athens, for instance, which is given great prominence in the Ambrosian *Vita*, does not figure into most modern accounts, whether explicitly or implicitly.⁴ The stark contrast should serve as a healthy reminder that our contemporary assumptions about the stylistic (epinician), social (aristocratic) and geographic (Sicilian and Aeginetan) preferences of the lyric poet were not shared by an ancient audience who may have best known Pindar through his dithyrambic compositions. But rather than assess the ways that the authors of later biographies responded to Pindar's work, I would like to explore how Pindar himself is responding to the increasingly important role that poetic biography already played in his own lifetime. In making the case for Pindar the biographer, I will examine how the lyric poet skilfully constructs 'lives' for his poetic predecessors in a deliberate dialogue with the practice of *bios* writing that was then emerging. My analysis will also suggest ways in which the model of poetic biography can help us to rethink the much debated role of Pindar's first-person voice.

In exploring how thinking biographically can generate new ways of understanding ancient poetry, my focus on the work of Pindar is far from accidental. Pindar is an important figure in the realm of ancient life writing for a number of connected reasons. In the twentieth century, Pindaric scholarship, perhaps more than any other field, came to be dominated by biographical interpretations. It was in reaction to the great credence that scholars granted to the ancient accounts of Pindar's life that Lefkowitz first began to examine the *bios* tradition.⁵ Even now that the 'fictional' nature of the *bioi* has been well established, it is hard to find a better example of how the ancient lives are shaped by a desire to graft the branches and boughs of a poet's work onto the firm trunk of biographical narrative. But Lefkowitz's interest in Pindar's life stems from a second, more fundamental aspect of Pindar's uniquely biographical character: the remarkable amount of his poetry

that is devoted to what looks to be autobiographical detail. There are few ancient poets more overtly invested in fashioning their own life story than Pindar, an author who consistently, almost haphazardly, places his first-person voice and experiences in the foreground of his poetry. Not only does Pindar regularly include descriptions of his own process of composition within his works, he often recounts the social and economic factors that have compelled him to produce a poem and even narrates aspects of his life which, at least at first blush, seem to have little or no connection to a poem's primary purpose.⁶ Pindar suffuses his poetry with details of his life. So pervasive is his focus on his own first-person experience that it is hard to escape the conclusion that, as Giovan Battista D'Alessio has argued, the creative genesis behind the ancient *bios* (or *bioi*) of Pindar must ultimately be traced back to Pindar himself.⁷ In other words, Pindar himself shared, indeed pre-empted, the biographers' desire to link his 'life' to his poetic work. Alongside whatever other function they may have served, Pindar deliberately crafted his verses to create his own self-image.

The complex, often paradoxical nature of the poetic identity that Pindar constructs for himself through his verses has been the subject of heated scholarly debate for decades.⁸ In recent years we have, for the most part, come to view Pindar's first-person statements as elegant fictions, with no more basis in historical reality than the *bioi* which they later inspired.⁹ Less agreed upon are the reasons why Pindar should have been so concerned with the fabrication of his poetic identity. In an effort to divorce our understanding of Pindar's first-person statements from the overly literal interpretations of past scholars, many have turned their attention to the context of Pindar's poetic performance, adopting the circumstances of reception, rather than composition, as determinant of content.¹⁰ First-person declarations, such as Pindar's frequent claims to be a guest-friend (*xenos*) of his *laudandus*, are ascribed to encomiastic considerations and attributed to the *persona* created by Pindar to fit his poetic circumstances.¹¹ If, however, we take the model of ancient lives as our guide, we are presented with an

alternative model for assessing the ‘fictionality’ of Pindar’s first-person statements. Just as we have learned to do with the *bioi* themselves, it is possible to acknowledge that Pindar’s first-person statements are indeed ‘biographical’ without imputing any historical veracity, literal or contextual, to the claims which they set forth. When Pindar speaks, for example, of his encounter with a dead hero (*Pythian* 8.56–60) or proudly claims that his grandmother is Theban Metope (*Olympian* 6.84–5), it is not wholly convincing to attribute these assertions to encomiast obligations alone. Pindar refers to personal experiences outside the laudatory context of his poetry, experiences that stem from (an idea of) the poet’s life, albeit experiences that may not have any basis in what we would consider historical reality. Such first-person statements are more than just the source of a rich biographical tradition. By including so much material about himself within his poems Pindar was, in essence, engaged in the project of writing his own poetic life. Pindar’s work as a biographer is not, however, exclusively self-referential.¹² In the course of fashioning his own *bios* he occasionally finds himself engaged in the broader project of narrating the lives of past poets.¹³

Catching sight of the glutton

Archilochus is likely to have been amongst the first poets after Homer and Hesiod to be incorporated into the tradition of poetic *bioi* and his status as a biographical figure was well established by the beginning of the fifth century.¹⁴ Pindar mentions Archilochus by name twice in his extant works. In the opening of *Olympian* 9, he briefly refers to Archilochus’ traditional role in glorifying athletic achievement.¹⁵ A fuller picture of the archaic poet is found midway through Pindar’s second *Pythian* ode, composed for the Syracusan tyrant Hieron. Pindar’s representation of Archilochus could hardly be called a *bios* in the traditional sense, but I would argue that it should nevertheless be considered ‘biographical’ insofar as it describes a living man, possessed of human attributes and engaged in a discrete life event or activity:

A poetic possession: Pindar's *Lives*

ἐμὲ δὲ χρεῶν
φεύγειν δάκος ἄδινὸν κακαγοριᾶν.
εἶδον γὰρ ἐκάς ἐὼν τὰ πόλλ' ἐν ἀμαχανίᾳ
ψογερὸν Ἀρχίλοχον βαρυλόγοις ἔχθεσιν
πταινόμενον·

Pindar, *Pythian* 2.52–6

But I must flee the persistent bite of censure, for standing
at a distance I often saw Archilochus the blamer in
difficulty¹⁶ as he grew fat on dire words of hatred.

The passage has traditionally been interpreted as an expression of poetic rivalry.¹⁷ Pindar may well be invoking distinctions of genre between his own epinician song of praise and the 'words of hatred' that comprise Archilochean iambic,¹⁸ but the contrast is drawn in terms that are entirely and emphatically biographical. It is important to note that the main force of the description rests not on Archilochus' poetic verses (the defects of which are never explicitly defined) but on his behaviour as a man. Indeed the sharp appraisal contained in the final metaphor of fattening oneself on words (βαρυλόγοις ἔχθεσιν πταινόμενον) cannot but prompt reflection on the flesh-and-blood nature of the appetitive, ineffectual Archilochus that Pindar has chosen to include in his poem. Pindar's assessment of his predecessor's poetic legacy is expressed through the language of biography.

In offering this biographically charged vignette, Pindar embeds Archilochus, the autonomous poet of the past, within his own work and, in so doing, the epinician poet transforms his iambic predecessor into a character of his own devising. More broadly, the actions and attributes that Pindar ascribes to Archilochus shed light on the epinician poet's idea of a poetic life.¹⁹ Pindar's Archilochus may be a negative exemplar, but this inverted image is nonetheless shaped by Pindar's broader notions of what matters in a poet's biography. When Pindar speaks of Archilochus in *Pythian* 2 he not only speaks of the dead poet as a man, but as a man whom he has *seen*.²⁰ By insisting on the visual nature of his encounter with Archilochus, Pindar ensures that we understand their meeting to be one of two bodies. The corporeal nature of the description,

emphasised by the focus on Archilochus' appetite, invokes the complex questions of embodiment and presence that are intrinsic to biographical thinking, particularly artistic biography. What is more, the insistence on autopsy renders the narrative doubly biographical, for it offers a glimpse of Pindar's poetic life at the same time as it relates the life of Archilochus. The lives of the two poets are interwoven, not through outright poetic competition or familial inheritance, as poets' lives so often are in the *bioi*, but through the mere fact of proximity and shared experience: Pindar has been witness to Archilochus' life. In constructing his unusual narrative of connection to Archilochus, Pindar's divergence from the standards of conventional biography is telling. The event can hardly be making a claim for historical veracity; Pindar and his audience would undoubtedly have thought of Archilochus as a long-dead predecessor. Thus the biographical connection between the two poets should be taken as a sign that Pindar's idea of a life, and more importantly, a poetic life, does not conform to ancient or modern notions of biographical truth.

Pindar can be seen to reflect on the unconventional nature of his relationship to Archilochus in his reference to the distance that separated the two poets during their encounter: he was able to see Archilochus, but only at a remove (εἶδον γὰρ ἐκὰς ἔων).²¹ The spatial detail brings the tension of the poets' relationship to the surface, asserting that the connection between the two men has not fully erased the temporal gulf that separates them. This paradoxical fusion of proximity and distance fits readily into a pattern of poetic self-expression that Pindar has already established for himself from the outset of the ode. In fact, we can view the Archilochus vignette as the concluding section of a ring-structure of poetic self-reflection that frames the first half of the poem.²²

Pindar commences his great ode to the tyrant Hieron with an apostrophe to his city, Syracuse. The address reflects the stature of the victor for whom the ode was composed, but it also provides a geographical framework for the poet himself. It is in this respect that the victor's city will first be understood:

A poetic possession: Pindar's *Lives*

Μεγαλοπόλεις ὦ Συράκοσαι, βαθυπολέμου
τέμενος Ἄρεος, ἀνδρῶν ἵππων τε σιδαροχαρμᾶν δαιμόνια
τροφοί,
ὑμῖν τόδε τᾶν λιπαρᾶν ἀπὸ Θηβᾶν φέρων
μέλος ἔρχομαι ἀγγελίαν τετραορίας ἐλελίχθονος . . .
Pindar, *Pythian* 2.1–4

O great city of Syracuse, sanctuary of Ares mighty in war, divine nurse of men and horses delighting in steel, to you I come from shining Thebes bearing this song and its news of the four-horse chariot that shakes the earth . . .

The opening passage balances the poet between two geographic poles. On the one hand, the poet clearly sets his performance in Syracuse. The sense of proximity created by the poet's apostrophic address is substantiated by his claim of physical presence (ἔρχομαι).²³ Yet at the same time, the poet gestures towards the point of his departure, Thebes. The origin of both poet and song, Thebes stands in the background. It is not the location for the poem's glorious performance, but the place of its birth and composition.²⁴ The distance between these two geographic coordinates is doubly bridged: by the speaker who is himself in motion and by the song (the μέλος that is also an ἀγγελία) that has made the journey with him. The destination, we are told, is determined by the occasion; Hieron's victory, divinely sanctioned. The poet sets his audience's gaze firmly on Hieron and Syracuse, transforming his addressees (the city and its inhabitants) into the stage for his song. But even as his listeners are fused with the emphatically present scene of poetic performance, Pindar conjures another place in the distance, Thebes, the place from which the man and the song have come.²⁵ Beyond its name, we know almost nothing of this other geographic pole. We are told only that it is λιπαρός: rich, splendid, fruitful. Our attention is drawn to this distant land, but we are not invited to enter into the world behind the song. Thebes is a space occupied only by the poet. And in its marked spatial remove from the communal space of performance, it resembles the distant platform on which Pindar will glimpse the floundering Archilochus when the

first-person voice of the poet again emerges after an extended mythical excursus. Where Archilochus fattened himself to negative result, Pindar draws his verses of praise from the fertile, shining land of Thebes. But both men allow themselves to be seen in a similar manner, coming into view through their compositions, albeit at a remove. And like Pindar contemplating Archilochus, we, the audience situated in the Syracuse of the poems' performance, are invited to observe how our ability to 'see' Pindar is conditional on the great distance between us.

This preliminary glimpse of Pindar the biographer hints at the powerful connections between poetic biography and the idea of authorship that, more than any other factor, motivate the lyric poet to compose his unconventional *bioi*. Indeed, the most fundamental assumption of a poetic biography, whatever its form, is that a specific man, identifiable and unique, was responsible for the production of a work of poetry. Viewed biographically, authors cannot be considered to exist wholly within their works, but rather must make some claim to extra-textual existence. Although in one respect Archilochus is simply a character in Pindar's poetry, his status as the author of his verses also preserves an external reality that cannot be reduced to any single performance occasion or biographical description. Hence we can read the spatial detail (ἐκὰς ἑών) in a second, slightly more theoretical fashion. Pindar may be able to 'see' Archilochus through his works, but the iambic poet will always remain at a distance inasmuch as he is not simply or fully a *persona* contained by his works. The biographical poet remains tethered to the moment of creation and stands outside of the subsequent history that his verses will then enjoy. Likewise, by locating his poetic creation in his Theban homeland Pindar seeks to establish a firm extra-poetic grounding for himself, and thereby to ensure that his own authorship is on clear display in his work.

In identifying this model of biographical authorship in Pindar, I am guided by a novel perspective put forth by Alexander Nehamas in a well-considered response to Foucault.²⁶ Recognising the many limitations of a world without

authorship, Nehamas challenges the Foucauldian view that authorship (particularly the kind of authorship that joins disparate texts into what we would call a corpus or an *oeuvre*) introduces a problematic claim of ownership and a commodification of the text as the property of the author.²⁷ Nehamas rejects outright the basic premise of Foucault's position, asserting that authors cannot, in fact, claim ownership of their works. Rather than possessors of their texts, Nehamas claims, true authors are in fact possessed by them. So defined, the author emerges when texts are subjected to literary interpretation by their readers, and only through a reader's critical engagement can a text become possessed of an author. Crucially, Nehamas' textually engendered author inhabits a special place, neither fully independent nor wholly contained by the work of which he is, in fact, the possession. In other words, such authors are distinct both from the historically living 'writer' of the text and from any fictional *persona* representing the 'author function' within the text.²⁸ As Nehamas explains:

The relation between authors and texts is much more complex than the relations between texts and fictional characters. The first cannot be reduced to the second; it is not, in particular, an immanent relation. Though an author too is a character, it is a character manifested or exemplified in a text and not depicted or described in it . . . The relation between author and text can be called, not simply because a better word is lacking, 'transcendental'. Unlike fictional characters, authors are not simply parts of texts; unlike actual writers, they are not straightforwardly outside them.²⁹

This unique category of author, existing in a world neither fully inside nor outside of the text, is the product of the special condition generated by the critical engagement of the reader (or audience). The author is a manifestation of the text, but cannot be produced by the text alone. Interpretation unlocks the text's potential, allowing its author to transcend its limitations and emerge into the world beyond.

Nehamas would like his definition of authorship to define the nebulous category of 'literature': to identify those texts which are qualitatively distinct from and superior to their authorless comrades. As such, his interest is in universals and

his picture is largely a timeless one. As classicists, by contrast, we can hardly do without a sense of history. On the one hand, our own distance from the ancient texts that we read causes us to posit far more (and far more baffling) interpretative questions, requiring a more robust textual 'author' to offer a response. It is perhaps for this reason that, as Richard Hunter has noted, anonymous texts fare so poorly in the scholarly tradition.³⁰ Once the *Prometheus Bound* no longer places us in dialogue with 'Aeschylus', we find our access to the text greatly diminished. This rather unattractive tendency of our scholarship might well be corrected by an open admission of our reliance on authors to guide our readings of certain texts. If we were willing to posit openly a 'Prometheus author' (a long-lost fourth voice of fifth-century tragedy) the interpretative spark might well be rekindled.

But this general question of ancient authorship is not my main concern. It may be that authorship emerges as the product of interpretative relationships, but it is also a historical phenomenon which changes over time. Even as each interpreter is able to draw an author from the work that he deems worthy of scrutiny, we should still expect that the parameters of authorship that a text will admit will be historical in nature, tied as closely to the circumstances of composition as to the moment of interpretation. As a result, not all texts will possess authors in the same way, and the kinds of authors that texts possess will be determined to a significant degree by the historical moment in which they were written.

For Pindar, composing his verses amidst a flurry of critical interest in how the events and circumstances of a poet's life might relate to his work, it is unsurprising that musings on authorship would emerge through the manipulation of insistently biographical narratives. Pindar's distant vision of Archilochus gestures towards the type of transcendent manifestation that Nehamas identifies as characteristic of authorship. In considering Archilochus' status as a poetic predecessor and negative exemplar, Pindar has turned a critical eye towards Archilochus' work and in so doing he has caused an author to emerge. This author is formed in distinctly

biographical terms. Pindar's Archilochus is not simply a disembodied crafter of words. He is a living man, characterised by his appetite and irascibility as much as by his verses. To see this transcendent figure, Pindar must construct a *Life*.

One gains a better appreciation of the biographical nature of the depiction of Archilochus in *Pythian* 2 through contrast with other modes in which Pindar represents his poetic predecessors. Pindar does not think of past poets in exclusively biographical terms. He is equally content to adopt a citation-based style of reference, pairing a quotation of allusion to a poet's proper name.³¹ Thus, for instance, when Archilochus' victory refrain is invoked in *Olympian* 9, the past poet does not emerge as a fully embodied biographical figure, but rather as a much more hazy presence, little more than a name linked to a song.³²

The contrast between Pindar's biographical and citational references to past poets need not signal a divergence of approach. Indeed, the use of proper names in poetic citation stems from the same critical discourse that produced much of the biographical scholarship in the late sixth and early fifth centuries. Both habits reflect the general desire to identify the distinctive outlines and attributes of past poets and thus to step away from the more amorphous figures of poetic tradition.³³ The harmony of outlook is nicely illustrated in Pindar's single explicit mention of Hesiod at the close of *Isthmian* 6 when he praises the victor's father, Lampon, for his adherence to the wisdom of the epic poet:³⁴

Λάμπων δὲ μελέταν
ἔργοις ὀπάζων Ἡσιόδου μάλα τιμᾷ τοῦτ' ἔπος,
υἱοῖσι τε φράζων παραινεῖ
Pindar, *Isthmian* 6.66–9

Taking care in his deeds, Lampon truly honours the verse
of Hesiod, and speaking it out, recommends it to his
sons.

The reference is a clear example of the citational style, with the technical specification τοῦτ' ἔπος underlining the fact that the lyric poet has a specific Hesiodic line in mind (i.e. *Works*

and *Days* 412; μελέτη δέ τοι ἔργον ὀφέλλει). Yet the poetic citation is situated within a biographical frame, albeit a moment from the life of the victor and his family rather than that of the poet himself. As D'Alessio has noted, 'Pindar is not simply quoting a sentence; he is making his patron quote it'.³⁵ The lyric poet presents us with an example of how Hesiod's verses are being put to use in the lives of Pindar's contemporaries who continue to give voice to the dead poet's words. But the language of the citation also invites us to draw an overt parallel between the lived experience of Pindar's patrons and the poetic ἔργα of Hesiod (a connection which is further encouraged by the possible pun on the title of Hesiod's great poem).³⁶ The endeavours of Lampon and his sons are analogised to Hesiod's own labours in the past, implicitly asserting that the poet lived a life that was similar, at least in certain respects, to that of the men for whom Pindar is now singing. Pindar embeds his citation in such a way that Hesiod's verse is unavoidably entangled in biographical circumstance.

Pindar's brief treatment of Hesiod in *Isthmian* 6 does not offer a biographical sketch of the dead poet, but it does allow us to see the essential harmony of the two modes of poetic reference. Whereas simply naming a poet allows Pindar to demonstrate his sophisticated appreciation of that poet's work,³⁷ the biographical approach permits a meditation on the status of the man above and beyond the significance of any single passage or work he may have composed. When the past poet becomes a character within the text, Pindar presents us with an author whom we come to see as more than the sum of his speech. As an author possessed of a *Life*, the model of Archilochus helps us to see how Pindar intends to use his own *bios* to transform the *persona loquens* of his verse into an author able to transcend what is immanent in the text.

The blind poet looks to the future

More than any other poet, Homer serves as companion and foil to Pindar. Homer furnishes the fifth-century lyric poet with

a model for his own verses and an exemplar against which to measure his status as poet.³⁸ Pindar's approach to Homer's poetic legacy is marked by such subtle complexity and imaginative variety that it nearly rivals his thinking about his own lyric compositions.³⁹ In mapping Pindar's relationship to the epic poet, two programmatic passages, from *Isthmian* 3/4 and *Nemean* 7, provide a foundation for thinking about biographical authorship. As with the description of Archilochus discussed above, these two passages cannot be called biography in any strict sense. But both poems offer a vignette of the living poet and by so doing invite us to consider the relationship between Homer's life and his work.

In *Isthmian* 3/4, mention of Homer's praise of Ajax occasions a description of the epic poet's compositional practice and the lasting fame that his words have achieved. The passage, Briand notes, has received less critical attention than its counterparts,⁴⁰ perhaps due to the fact that the deferential stance that Pindar adopts towards his epic predecessor does not excite the imagination of many modern scholars. Homer's praise of Ajax here is a positive model for the epinician poet who concludes the passage with a prayer that he be able to light the same fire of song that has brought the bard eternal fame:

ἀλλ' Ὅμηρός τοι τετίμακεν δι' ἀνθρώπων, ὃς αὐτοῦ
 πᾶσαν ὀρθώσας ἀρετὰν κατὰ ῥάβδον ἔφρασεν
 θεσπεσίων ἐπέων λοιποῖς ἀθύρειν.
 τοῦτο γὰρ ἀθάνατον φωνᾷεν ἔρπει,
 εἴ τις εὖ εἴπη τι· καὶ πάγκαρπον ἐπὶ χθόνα καὶ διὰ πόντον
 βέβακεν
 ἐργμάτων ἀκτὶς καλῶν ἄσβεστος αἰεῖ.
 προφρόνων Μοισᾶν τύχοιμεν, κείνων ἄψαι πυρσὸν ὕμνων
 καὶ Μελίσσω, παγκρατίου στεφάνωμ' ἐπάξιον, . . .
 Pindar, *Isthmian* 3/4.55–63

But Homer honoured him amongst mortals,
 straightening the entire tale of his virtue when leaning
 upon his staff of divine verses he spoke it out for future
 men to sing. For a thing goes forth with an immortal
 voice, if someone speaks it well. And over the all-fertile
 land and sea the flame of his noble deeds travelled

unquenchable for all time. May we meet with
favourable Muses and light the same fire of songs for
Melissos as well, a worthy crown for his boxing . . .

Through Pindar's account of how Homer composed his epic narrative of Ajax's great deeds we are treated to a vision of the living poet as he fashions his verses.⁴¹ The main verb *ἔφρασεν* marks the composition as oral in nature. This picture of extemporaneous composition is further emphasised by the staff on which the poet rests as he plies his craft. By highlighting the epic poet's characteristic appurtenance, Pindar ensures that we treat this Homer as a man. Leaning on his staff, speaking out his immortal verses as he crafts them, Pindar shows us a moment in the poet's life. Mention of the *ῥάβδος* would also have evoked the tradition of rhapsodic performance of the Homeric epics, a tradition with which Pindar reveals his familiarity at the opening of *Nemean* 2.⁴² The poet's staff is thus both a connection to the biographical author's single, inalienable moment of creation and a symbol of the continued performances that his verses enjoy after Homer's own life has come to an end, a theme that will emerge as a significant aspect of this depiction.

Although he is long dead, Pindar's Homer, like his Archilochus, is not contained within an idealised past. His verses may be the product of extemporaneous composition, but like the staff on which the poet supports himself, they also look forward to a rich future of reperformance. Pindar offers no description of Homer's original audience, rather, he turns his attention immediately to the future performers (*λοιπτοί*) of the newly crafted song.⁴³ The importance of the temporal extension of this single moment of composition is made clear in the gnomic statement that caps this brief biographical sketch: *If someone speaks well, his words travel with an immortal voice*. The lack of specificity in the reference engenders thoughts of a whole poem, or even an *oeuvre*, rather than any particular lines.⁴⁴ The aim of the depiction is biography, not citation. Pindar does more than simply hear Homer's voice in reperformance. As with Archilochus, Pindar can also see the poet as he

was when he first 'straightened' his verses. The poetic future through which Homer foresaw his poem would travel stands as a vast gulf separating the epic poet and his lyric 'biographer'. And yet, looking back at Homer's life, Pindar can still discern the flesh-and-blood poet through all of the subsequent mediating voices. Homer's corporeal frame, supported on the staff that would become a symbol of his immortality, retains its integrity. Pindar too looks forward to such poetic success, and in so doing makes his own claim for a biographical permanence, a support for his immortal song that, like Homer's *rhabdos*, will simultaneously define the unique bond between the poet and his work and allow that work to be shared with future performers and audiences.

In *Nemean* 7 Pindar's depiction of Homer is couched in the language of censure, though it is of a milder strain than that directed against Archilochus in *Pythian* 2. The criticism at first seems to be levelled at Homer's epic verses, but it is no less biographically focused than the positive vignette of *Isthmian* 3/4. Again Ajax is the subject of Homer's epic narrative, now focusing on his suicide following the judgement of the arms, and once again Homer's poetic skill is the subject of consideration:

ἐγὼ δὲ πλέον' ἔλπιτομαι
 λόγον Ὀδυσσεὺς ἢ πάθαν διὰ τὸν ἀδυσπετὴ γενέσθ' Ὀμηρον·
 ἐπεὶ ψεύδεσιν οἱ ποτανᾶ τε μαχανᾶ
 σεμνὸν ἔπεστί τι· σοφία δὲ κλέπτει παράγοισα μύθοις. τυφλὸν
 δ' ἔχει
 ἦτορ ὄμιλος ἀνδρῶν ὁ πλεῖστος. εἰ γὰρ ἦν
 ἔ τὰν ἀλάθειαν ἰδέμεν, οὐ κεν ὄπλων χολωθεῖς
 ὁ καρτερός Αἴας ἔπαξε διὰ φρενῶν
 λευρὸν ξίφος·

Pindar, *Nemean* 7.20–7

I believe that Odysseus' story has become greater than his actual suffering because of Homer's sweet verse, for upon his falsehoods and soaring craft rests great majesty, and his skill deceives with misleading tales. The great majority of men have a blind heart, for if they could have seen the truth, mighty Ajax, in anger over the arms, would not have planted in his chest the smooth sword.

Much debate over these lines has centred on the difficulties that attend the relationship between Homer and the characters of his poems. The knottiest interpretative challenge arises regarding the false speech that leads to Ajax's death (the *ψεῦδεσσι* οἱ ποτανᾶ τε μάχανᾶ of line 22). Is this speech to be attributed to the poet, Homer, or to his character, Odysseus? A conservative reading would attribute all of the falsehood and error to characters within Homer's poems.⁴⁵ On this model, Odysseus tricked the blind masses of the Argive troops with his *pseudea*, convincing them to award him Achilles' armour and causing Ajax to kill himself. Homer is guilty only of repeating Odysseus' speech. Any confusion with Homer is due to the great scope afforded to Odysseus' first-person speech in the four books of the *apologoi*.⁴⁶ This reading provides a satisfactory account of these lines. But we are left to wonder why the fate of Ajax should be linked to sweet-versed Homer's misleading picture of Odysseus. In light of the biographical perspective that we have found elsewhere in Pindar's treatment of past poets, it is noteworthy that Pindar describes the soaring craft (ποτανᾶ τε μάχανᾶ) that accompanies the powerful fictions with terminology similar to that which attended his description of Archilochus in *Pythian* 2 (τὰ πόλλ' ἐν ἀμαχανίᾳ).⁴⁷ To account for Homer's presence in the passage adequately, we must allow for a more porous boundary between Pindar's figuration of the poet and his characters.

Undoubtedly there is a certain affinity, to use Segal's term, which links Homer's speech to the deceptive *muthoi* of Odysseus.⁴⁸ But there is also, as Kromer has noted, a real sense that the poet is 'somehow responsible for the downfall of Aiax'.⁴⁹ Indeed, Pindar seems to be suggesting that the lack of clarity and adherence to the truth attributed to Homer in the passage's introduction is to blame for the error in judgement that led to the great hero's suicide. The Achaean masses are blind (τυφλὸν δ' ἔχει ἥτορ ὁμιλος ἀνδρῶν ὁ πλεῖστος), but so too is Homer. Indeed the bard's blindness is one of the most stable features of his biographical tradition. As Graziosi has noted, the popularity of Homer's blindness in the biographical tradition stems, at least in part, from the great variety of

interpretations that it permits.⁵⁰ Here then we find the blind poet enmeshed in the struggles of his own verses, unable to see clearly what narrative choices he should make. It is through Ajax's death that Pindar can discern the poet's blindness, and thus the epic song becomes a vehicle through which to access the poet's life. Homer's life, represented in this passage by his most characteristic biographical trait, exemplifies Nehamas' idea of an author possessed by his work. The epic poet is manifest, though not immanent, in his poem; he shares in the lives of his characters without himself becoming a character. Pindar plays on the ambiguity of this relationship between author and text as he recounts the parallel events in the lives of Homer, Odysseus and Ajax.

Pindar also reflects here upon the double gaze of the biographer who sees the author through his work. By assimilating the distinct biographical narratives of Homer and Ajax, the lyric poet compels us to recognise Homer's dependency on his verses; the poet must rely on his characters to reveal the contours of his own life. The depiction of Homer in *Nemean* 7 is demonstrative of Pindar's approach to biographical narrative. In his conflation of poet and text, Pindar employs one of the central techniques of ancient biography to his own poetic ends. The transposition of author and character that Pindar engineers in *Nemean* 7 is the very operation through which the writers of *bioi* fashion a poet's life so as to suit the stories in his texts.⁵¹ Homer's blindness, a defining (though not universally accepted) trait relayed through his biographical tradition, is lyrically re-imagined as a property of his authorship, something that emerges from the text as the life of the poet is formed. Pindar exploits the biographical resonances of the bard's characteristic blindness in order to blend the role of author and character. In so doing he capitalises on, but more importantly exposes, the narrative mechanics that will come to typify classical literary *bioi*. It is this same biographical alchemy that Pindar employs in the creation of his own poetic life.

Nowhere is the affinity between Pindar's life of Homer and his own poetic *bios* more richly explored than in *Isthmian* 8,

where the epic poet permeates the central narrative. The ode, composed for the Aeginetan Cleandros, is primarily comprised of an extended meditation on the deeds of Achilles (lines 27–60). The narrative, unlike most of Pindar’s other mythical accounts, tells a complete life of the hero from birth to death.⁵² The structure is complex. The tale begins as a proleptic narrative in the form of a prophetic speech (Themis instructs the Olympians how to avoid generational strife by marrying Thetis to Peleus, to whom Achilles will be born), and only after the goddess has sketched the broad strokes of Achilles’ life does Pindar himself take up the task of recounting the hero’s great exploits at Troy. Pindar never explicitly names Homer, the poet whose name is tied to Achilles and Troy, yet his condensed narrative demonstrates an abiding concern with the poetic qualities of Achilles’ life. The arc of the hero’s biography is framed at beginning and end by meditations on the relationship between his life and the verses that enable and record it.

Themis’ extended speech, first presented in a loose *oratio obliqua* (27–36) before abruptly shifting to *oratio recta* (36–45), lays the groundwork for the poetic preoccupation of the narrative. Even before his birth, Achilles’ life is embedded in the speech of others. His death and great speed, but also his childhood and education at the hands of Chiron, subjects of the various epic treatments of his life, are all foretold (36a–41). Through her words Themis takes control over what Burnett calls the poem’s ‘cosmic order’,⁵³ adeptly orchestrating the actions of the Olympian gods, but also importing the language and spirit of Trojan epic. At the same time, Themis’ speech evinces a generative force, bringing the majestic Achilles into the world of the poem before he has even been conceived:

ὥς φάτο Κρονίδαις
ἐννέποισα θεά· τοὶ δ’ ἐπὶ γλεφάροις
νεῦσαν ἀθανάτοισιν· ἐπέων δὲ καρπὸς
οὐ κατέφθινε. φαντὶ γὰρ ξύν’ ἀλέγειν
καὶ γάμον Θέτιος ἄνακτα, καὶ νεαρὰν ἔδειξαν σοφῶν
στόματ’ ἀπείροισιν ἀρετὰν Ἀχιλλεύς·

Pindar, *Isthmian* 8.45–8

A poetic possession: Pindar's *Lives*

Thus spoke the goddess to the sons of Kronos, and they
nodded agreement with their immortal eyes. And the
fruit of her words did not perish, for they say that the
lord joined the others in favouring that marriage of
Thetis, and the mouths of the wise have revealed
Achilles' youthful excellence to those unaware of it.

Themis' words bear fruit (ἐπέων δὲ καρπός). Just as Homer did in *Isthmian* 3/4, Themis gives life to a poetic tradition through her speech, providing a subject for the mouths of poets (σοφῶν στόματα). But this poetic tradition is inseparable from the life of the child, Achilles, whose great deeds have already been narrated in the goddess's prophecy. In effect it is Themis, as much as Thetis, who gives Achilles life.

If Themis' words are doubly generative of Achilles' life and song, Pindar nevertheless underlines the asymmetrical relationship between the hero and his poetic legacy, drawing our attention to the finitude of the mortal's life in contrast with poetry's unbounded continuation. The basic notion is hardly unprecedented. But his perspective on this foundational tenet of archaic poetics is lent freshness and vitality by the creative approach to biographical narrative:

τὸν μὲν οὐδὲ θανόντ' ᾄοιδοὶ ἐπέλιπον,
ἀλλὰ οἱ παρὰ τε πυρὰν τάφον θ' Ἑλικῶνιαι παρθέναι
στάν, ἐπὶ θρῆνόν τε πολύφαιμον ἔχσαν.

Pindar, *Isthmian* 8.56–8

Not even when he died did songs abandon him, but the
Heliconian maidens stood beside his pyre and his tomb
and poured over him their dirge of many voices.

The tradition that places the Muses at Achilles' funeral undoubtedly predates the earliest surviving mention of it, in the final book of the *Odyssey*.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Pindar is able to imbue the event with a sense of novelty through his striking use of litotes. The construction implies, though one knows it not to have been the case, that Achilles might have been abandoned by song at his death. The implication has a two-fold resonance. On the one hand, we are faced with the prospect of a truly mortal Achilles, a man left unsung in

death. On the other, the formulation of the Muses' behaviour as a possible cessation reminds us that the whole of Achilles' mortal life has already been attended by the divine singers.⁵⁵ We are returned, that is, to Themis' prophecy and the role that song has played in the creation of the hero. In death as in birth, Achilles lives a poetic life, and as such he serves as a model for the poets who sing him. As we are invited to contemplate the special nature of Achilles' life-in-song, the inseparability of his *bios* from the enchanting voices of the Muses gestures to another biographical beneficiary of this mutually-reinforcing fecundity: Homer himself. The life of the bard, no less than that of his greatest subject, is delineated by the ceaseless singing of the Muses who inspire his song. As with the *pseudea* that he told about Odysseus, the distinction between the two figures dissolves under close scrutiny. And so too Pindar, by engaging in the double biographical project – telling the life of Achilles and of Homer – implicates himself in the process of poetic biogenesis. In crafting his *bios* of Achilles, Pindar has fashioned three lives: for the hero, for Homer and for himself.

It should come as little surprise, then, that *Isthmian* 8 is amongst the most autobiographical of Pindar's extant works.⁵⁶ The poem opens with a series of rapid-fire first-person statements that are remarkable for the degree of focus that they place on the poet's life. Pindar speaks of his recent troubles, of his grief and the suffering from which he has been freed. But these personal woes cannot sever his connection to the world of song (τῷ καὶ ἐγὼ, καίπερ ἀχνύμενος / θυμόν, αἰτέομαι χρυσέαν καλέσαι Μοῖσαν – *Thus I, although I am grieving in my heart, am called upon to summon the golden Muses*, 5–7). Pindar's life is inextricably linked to the Muses, an analogue to the life of the great hero, Achilles, which will soon be the subject of the ode. Achilles' life is fully circumscribed by the song that will grant him poetic immortality; the song of Themis precedes his birth while that of the Muses outlasts him. But Pindar here stakes claim to an existence beyond his poetic pursuits. His authorship transcends the bounds of his work.

As the author of his text Pindar inhabits the boundary between song and life. If his strong first-person statements point to the world beyond the text, Pindar's subsequent, more measured self-references establish the symbiosis of author and song. The transition in biographical tone is marked by a shift from the bold first-person to an impersonal third-person construction just as the poet prepares to declare that most personal of details, the name of his homeland:

χρή δ' ἀγαθὸν ἐλπίδ' ἀνδρὶ μέλειν.
 χρή δ' ἐν ἑπταπύλοισι Θήβαις τραφέντα
 Αἰγίνα Χαρίτων ἄωτον προνέμειν . . .
 Pindar, *Isthmian* 8.15a–16a

It is necessary for a man to cherish good hope. And it is
 necessary for one raised in seven-gated Thebes to offer
 the choicest gift of the Graces to Aegina . . .

As we saw with *Pythian* 2, Thebes is Pindar's coding space, the source of his poetic expression and the foundational seat of his poetic *bios*. The importance of the location takes on even greater resonance when we recall the debates, perhaps already raging in the fifth century, over Homer's birthplace.⁵⁷ The poet's birthplace is the essential detail that defines his life. Yet Achilles' birth through words offers a contrasting model of a poetically generated *bios*. As he travels deeper into the narrative of his own life, Pindar seeks to marry his externally referenced life with a sense of textual dependence. The marked anaphora (χρή δ' ἀγαθὸν . . . χρή δ' ἐν) reinforces the impersonal construction.⁵⁸ But the generalizing tone of the gnomic first statement (ἀγαθὸν ἐλπίδ' ἀνδρὶ μέλειν) stands as an odd parallel for the far more personal details of the second (ἐν ἑπταπύλοισι Θήβαις τραφέντα etc.). Pindar is making a transition from the forceful first-person presence of the poem's opening strophe to the shadowy life that fully inhabits, and like Achilles is born from, his poem. He is also modelling his voice on the subtle understatement that characterises Homer's epic narration, seamlessly embedded within the very fabric of song.

The final stage of Pindar's transition from first-person biographer to silently present author occurs just after this shift to

the impersonal voice. As he begins to recount his mythical narrative, Pindar addresses the nymph Aegina, eponym of the victor's homeland.⁵⁹ The subtle apostrophe stands in contrast to the dynamic second-person addresses with which Pindar frames the poem, calling first on the young men of Aegina to rouse the *komos* for their victorious comrade (lines 1–5) and then to an unidentified group, possibly the same band of youth from the poem's opening lines, to grant the victor's uncle Nicocles his due honour (γεραίρετέ νιν 62). In both instances the poet speaks in the boldly deictic fashion that we have come to call Pindar's 'oral subterfuge', creating a sense that the song's composition and performance are spontaneous expressions of the poet's mind.⁶⁰ By contrast, the address to Aegina is concerned not with the circumstances of the ode's composition or performance, but with the world of its embedded mythical narrative. Adopting the nymph as his interlocutor, Pindar incorporates himself into the lives of his characters, stepping into a world that is wholly contained by his song. This type of apostrophe to figures *within* a mythic narrative is rare in Pindar,⁶¹ but is found with notable frequency in Homer's epics.⁶² Echoing a markedly epic precedent, Pindar's address to Aegina is perfectly suited to achieve the poet's twin aims: to embed the lyric poet within his song while at the same time adopting the poetic *persona* of the epic bard who has successfully done so in the past.

Pindar's pointed meditations on the *bioi* of poets of the past allow us to see the lyric poet thinking about the nature of his own poetic authorship. Biographical vignettes of Homer and Archilochus expose a cautious and understated strain in Pindar's poetic self-fashioning. His dynamic first-person statements set out a clear claim for authorship, but we cannot properly grasp what type of poetic life, and hence what type of authorship, Pindar aspires to without an appreciation of the biographical imagination that shapes his judgement of his poetic predecessors. In reading a life of Pindar through the lives that he constructs for other poets, the categories of genre and tradition become entwined with the vision of a living poet, a man to whom verses can be ascribed and whose presence is

conjured by the words composed in his voice. As the poet himself recedes from the physical space of performance, the figure of the author as a living man behind his song becomes a necessary possession of his poetry. Pindar is himself aware of the transcendent life which the songs of past poets confer on them, and he makes use of their model in constructing the life that will be his own poetic possession.

Notes

- 1 Momigliano (1971) 11.
- 2 Arist. *Poetics* c. 8, on the 'unity of plot'.
- 3 Fairweather (1974); (1984); Lefkowitz (1981; 2nd edn 2012); and Graziosi (2002).
- 4 *Vita Ambrosiana* 1.11–2.1. On the *vitae* of Pindar, see Daude *et al.* (2013).
- 5 See Lefkowitz (1975); (1978); (1980); (1981).
- 6 Lefkowitz (1963); Bowra (1964).
- 7 'Pindar is undoubtedly the first creator of the biographical legend later developed around his figure': so D'Alessio (1994) 138.
- 8 For an overview see Patten (2009) 187–90.
- 9 See recently Calame (2010), with bibliography.
- 10 Following Kurke (1991) many scholars have connected Pindar's *persona* to the role played by epinician poetry in re-integrating the victor to his community.
- 11 So Lefkowitz (1981) 135–46, 154–9. Recently Pelliccia (2009) 245–7 and Bowie (2012) have argued for a return to a more literal interpretation of such biographical claims.
- 12 Though see Irwin (2006) for how poets (in this case Solon) manipulated the reception of their own poetic *personae*.
- 13 These glimpses of past poets fit into the broader retrospective thematisation of Pindar's epinician poetry, which consistently places narrative emphasis on the exploits of the heroes of generations past. See Mackie (2003) ch. 2.
- 14 Irwin (1998); Clay (2004); and Kivilo (2010) 90–1.
- 15 The customary refrain, τήνελλα καλλίνικε, is attributed to Archilochus in a scholion to this passage. For discussion, see Gentili *et al.* (2013) 523.
- 16 The meaning of τὰ πόλλ' ἐν ἀμαχανίᾳ in this passage is debated. For my present purposes, it makes little difference what precise type of difficulty is implied by ἐν ἀμαχανίᾳ, though I am generally persuaded that the distress is primarily of a poetic and creative, rather than pecuniary, nature; so Carey (1981) *ad loc.* More

- recently Morgan (2015) 189–90 has shown that the two interpretations can, in fact, be understood as complementary.
- 17 See the bibliographical overview in Gentili and Bernardini (1995) 385–8. Beginning with the scholia, interpreters have even sought to identify a contemporary rival (most often Bacchylides) for whom Archilochus stands as proxy, so Grimm (1962).
 - 18 Most (1985) 89–90; Brown (2006); Steiner (2001); (2002); and (2011); for a different view see Rankin (1975). Miller (1981) links the contrasting tones to the poem's internal division between blame of Ixion and praise of Hieron, a position that Morgan (2008) 43–8 synthesises with questions of genre.
 - 19 Lefkowitz (1978) 462.
 - 20 My attention was drawn to the visual nature of Pindar's engagement with Archilochus by a paper that Christopher Brown delivered in Delphi in 2009, entitled 'Pindar's Vision of Archilochus'.
 - 21 So Gildersleeve (1885) *ad loc.*
 - 22 A different ring structure is identified by Most (1985) 69–70.
 - 23 Though of course this claim need not denote historical truth, cf. Felson (1999).
 - 24 Its 'coding' location, in the terminology of D'Alessio (2004). It has been suggested that Hieron's victory was in fact won at Thebes (for discussion, see Young (1983) 42–7). It seems more likely that the poet refers here, as he regularly does elsewhere, to the city as the place of his birth, so Gentili and Bernardini (1995) 47. But even if Thebes was the site of Hieron's victory, mention of the location by the Theban poet would not preclude personal resonances.
 - 25 Such bifurcated geography is regularly associated with the poet, as Pindar often uses first-person speech to draw attention to his ability to move through space and time; see e.g. Lefkowitz (1963) 199; Felson (1999).
 - 26 Nehamas (1987).
 - 27 The radical reconfigurations of the idea of authorship introduced in the last half century, above all the theories of Barthes and Foucault, have had an impact on our present discussion that can hardly be overstated. For an overview, see Compagnon (2004) 29–68.
 - 28 The idea of the 'author function' is set out in Foucault (1979).
 - 29 Nehamas (1987) 273.
 - 30 Hunter (2002) 91.
 - 31 The popularity of the citational style is discussed by Ford (1997).
 - 32 Pind. *Ol.* 9.1–2: Τὸ μὲν Ἀρχιλόχου μέλος φωνᾷεν Ὀλυμπία, καλλίνικος ὁ τριπλὸς κεχλαδῶς.

- 33 Ford (1997); Morgan (2000) 46–67; Ford (2002) chs. 2 and 3; and Struck (2004) 26–9.
- 34 The broader implications of Hesiod's strong influence on Pindar are well discussed by Kurke (1990), D'Alessio (2005) and Stamatopoulou (2008).
- 35 D'Alessio (2005) 331.
- 36 Kurke (1990) 89, n. 18 first suggested the pun, explaining that 'ἔργοις in this passage can be taken in two ways: to refer to Lampon's own works' and 'to refer explicitly to the Hesiodic *Erga*'.
- 37 Ford (1997) 92.
- 38 Briand (2001) 43.
- 39 Sotiriou (1998); Briand (2001) 42–4.
- 40 Briand (2001) 35.
- 41 I follow Privitera (1982) *ad loc.* in understanding the verb ὀρθόω here to denote the initial act of composition, and not, as some have suggested, the correction of an earlier version, a suggestion which seems to have been unduly influenced by the more antagonistic tone of *Nem.* 7.
- 42 Graziosi (2002) 30–1.
- 43 'Homer did not wish his verses to be a model for future poets, be they epic or lyric, because they too would praise Ajax. He wished to provide a song of praise that rhapsodes would be able to repeat forever, wherever they were': so Privitera (1982) 180 (my translation).
- 44 Pindar's broad definition of Homer's *oeuvre* was not limited to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; Nisetich (1989) 1; Ford (1997) 88; and Lloyd-Jones (2002) 2–3.
- 45 Most (1985) 148–54.
- 46 Most (1985) 150–1.
- 47 For poetic resonances of the word μάχανά and related terminology in Pindar see Martin (1983) 43–58.
- 48 Segal (1967) 442–3.
- 49 Kromer (1975).
- 50 Graziosi (2002) 160.
- 51 For Homer in particular, fifth-century critics rarely drew a distinction between the poet's first-person speech and that of his embedded characters, especially when offering the types of allegorical interpretation that Pindar may be alluding to here. See e.g. Ford (1999) 42–6.
- 52 A similarly totalising prophetic *bios* is found in *Pi. Nem.* 1.61–72, where Tiresias foretells the destiny of the infant Heracles. Koehnken (1975) 29, n. 27 notes that this is Pindar's only reference to the death of Achilles.

- 53 Burnett (2005) 114.
- 54 Burgess (2009) 40–2.
- 55 Carey (1981) 201.
- 56 Lefkowitz's important discussions of the 'autobiographical' nature of the opening of *Isthmian* 8, (1963) 210–15 and (1980) 31–4, actually demonstrate clear affinities with her pioneering work on ancient biography, a connection that is most clearly articulated in her analysis of the ways in which fifth-century poetic self-presentations are mirrored in later biographical narratives.
- 57 Graziosi (2002) 62–89.
- 58 Carey (1981) 193 comments: 'Pindar is fond of anaphora, but the present example is unparalleled'.
- 59 Pind. *Isth.* 8.21–3: σὲ δ' ἐξ νᾶσον Οἰνοπίαν ἐνεγκῶν κοιμᾶτο, δῖον ἔνθα τέκες Αἰακὸν βαρυσφαράγῳ πατρὶ κεδνότατον ἐπιχθονίων·
- 60 The term was coined by Carey (1981) 5.
- 61 Examples at Pind. *Ol.* 1.36, 45, 51; *Pyth.* 4.59, 175; *Ith.* 6.19 (anticipated); *Pae.* 2.1–4, 104–5 and fr. 81. A striking example of Homeric-style apostrophe within a speech in *oratio recta* appears at *P.* 4.89.
- 62 Parry (1972).

CHAPTER 6

WHAT'S IN A *LIFE*? SOME FORGOTTEN FACES OF EURIPIDES

JOHANNA HANINK

In the third book of his *Rhetoric* (c. 330 BC), Aristotle casually reports an anecdote about a tense moment in the life of Euripides. The anecdote offers a tantalizing glimpse at the imagined intersection between theatre and public life in Athens, but more importantly for us it dramatizes an unusual stance on biographical methodology. According to Aristotle, Euripides was once brought to court in an *antidosis* case: in democratic Athens, if someone did not have the resources for a liturgy that he had been called upon to perform, he could nominate another, richer citizen for the task.¹ We do not know the details of the *antidosis* involving Euripides, though evidently a dispute arose as to whether Euripides or his opponent, Hygiaenon, was truly the richer citizen, better equipped to perform the liturgy. Hygiaenon supposedly attempted to discredit Euripides by reminding the jurors of a notorious line that one of the playwright's characters pronounced on the stage. In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, after Phaedra's nurse has revealed to Hippolytus her mistress' desire for him, Hippolytus renounces his earlier promise of secrecy. The nurse entreats him to remember his oath to silence, but Hippolytus replies 'My tongue swore, but my mind is unsworn'.² Hygiaenon supposedly cited this line as evidence of Euripides' own duplicitous nature, presumably in an attempt to prove that Euripides was the wealthier potential liturgist. But to Hygiaenon's accusation Euripides made his own ready reply, namely that:

αὐτον ἄδικεῖν τὰς ἐκ τοῦ Διονυσιακοῦ ἀγῶνος κρίσεις εἰς τὰ δικαστήρια ἄγοντα·
ἐκεῖ γὰρ αὐτῶν δεδωκέναι λόγον, ἢ δώσειν εἰ βούλεται κατηγορεῖν.

(Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.1416a)

[Hygiaenon] was wrong to bring verdicts from the *agon* at the Dionysia into the courtroom, for [Euripides] had already given an account of those things there, or would give one if [Hygiaenon] should wish to make a charge against him.

Hippolytus had been performed as part of Euripides' only first prize-winning *didaskalia*, at the Great Dionysia in 428.³ But for the Euripides of Aristotle's anecdote, that victory or 'verdict' was of no relevance to the trial at hand: what happens on stage at the Great Dionysia stays on stage at the Great Dionysia, and a line delivered in the Theatre of Dionysus should not be used against the author sitting in court as an ordinary Athenian citizen.⁴

Aristotle's story marks a rare case from antiquity in which the traditional deductive methods of biography – that is, methods that rely on a poet's own works for illuminating his character and life – seem to be outright rejected. It is a powerful rejection, too, both because it is the biographical 'subject' who dismisses it, and because that subject is none other than Euripides: a poet whose life and character had always made for popular subjects of gossip and comic representation. Like Euripides' adversary Hygiaenon, ancient readers tended to extract 'biographical' information about poets from their poetry, and that strategy has left strong traces in the surviving testimonia about the poets' lives.

Two ancient remarks sum up this approach (the so-called 'Chamaeleontic method'), and both touch directly on the realm of drama and playwrights. One of the first known literary biographers, the late fourth-century BC, peripatetic Chamaeleon of Heraclea, is remembered for his claim that 'the tragedian attributes to his heroes things that he himself did'.⁵ And in Satyrus of Callatis' Hellenistic *Life of Euripides*, Aristophanes (the comic playwright) is credited with having pronounced, presumably with Euripides himself in mind, 'as are his characters, so is the man'.⁶ But as Pauline LeVen and Verity Platt will both demonstrate later in this volume, we must be wary of the temptation to read all of ancient biography as a product of the deductive or 'inferential' approach: anecdotes in particular provide more insight, even if at oblique angles, into

the cultures that produced them than into the lives of their protagonists. It is also the case that a number of similar anecdotes are repeated across the traditions for different poets and artists, and Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz (1934) were among the first to illuminate how many of these stories rematerialize as themes and variations in literatures of many languages, generation after generation. Nevertheless, Chamaeleon's and Satyrus' sound bites well represent the primary method that seems to have guided the *systematic* compilation of information about poets' lives in antiquity, a method that 'Euripides himself' allegedly challenged in the Athenian court.⁷

Such inference was certainly responsible for much of what is reported in ancient poetic *vitae*, the short biographies of poets that have been transmitted in manuscripts containing their works.⁸ For Mary Lefkowitz, the tradition surrounding Euripides proved especially conclusive in this regard: his ancient biographers demonstrably gleaned most of their information from his plays and from the comedies of Aristophanes, in which he so often appeared as a character. The Euripidean biographical tradition is itself unusually rich; the only ancient Greek poet who overshadows Euripides in variety and extent of preserved biographical information is 'Homer'. This is partially because the Euripidean *Vita* transmitted by the manuscripts is really a handful of *vitae* transcribed one after the other.⁹ And, unlike in the cases of his fellow tragedians Aeschylus and Sophocles, Euripides is also the subject of an early, largely extant biographical work: *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 1176 contains fragments of the biography of Euripides (framed as a dialogue) by the Hellenistic biographer Satyrus, our source for Aristophanes' famous pronouncement about the relationship between playwrights and their characters.¹⁰ These early biographies all cite historians of Attica and Alexandrian scholar-poets for certain information, but other details are obviously garnered from Euripidean tragedy and the comic tradition. Both Satyrus' work and the anonymous *vitae* are thus some of the strongest witnesses that ancient biographers drew lines, often straight lines, between poets' verses and their lives.

Yet antiquity's Euripidean 'biography' (a term that I use to refer to the whole of the scattered and inconsistent biographical tradition) consisted in much more than the explicitly biographical texts. Ancient sources patchily preserve an impressive number of anecdotes about and discussions of Euripides, many of which are never repeated in the later prose biographical narratives. These sources indicate that, in the centuries that followed Euripides' death, conversation and speculation about his life and manners continued with energy and impressive creativity. It is perhaps curious, though, that few of these earliest biographical testimonia (from the fourth and third centuries BC) found their way into the compiled *vitae* – or even into the modern authoritative source on the subject: the 'Testimonia vitae atque artis' section in Richard Kannicht's volume 5.1 of *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*.

The traditions that I have in mind present us with very different versions of Euripides than we find in the *vitae*, where he is sketched as a reclusive misogynist, a courtier of a Macedonian king and a man misunderstood by his fellow Athenians. In what follows I will consider two early biographical anecdotes that fashion the poet in what, from the stance of the *vitae*, appear to be unusual images: first as ideal Athenian citizen, then as intrepid traveller to a far-flung Aegean island. Like Aristotle's story about the pithy retort that Euripides made on the courtroom stand, both of these biographical testimonia also complicate the theory that ancient biographers simply cherry-picked lines from the poets' works in 'manufacturing' their life stories. In the first case, the reinvention of Euripides as a patriotic model of Athenian citizenship, lines from Euripides' *Erechtheus* are instead pressed into service as 'proof' that Euripides was exactly the opposite of the kind of figure that Aristophanes had concocted and staged – though Aristophanes' own version of the poet had also been inspired by his plays. My second example consists in an unusual anecdote about Euripides' travels to the island of Icaria. Embedded in that anecdote are a few lines of putatively Euripidean verse, and modern scholars have been undecided as to whether the poem gave rise to the story or vice versa. Both of these cases

reveal the complications of the inferential method, and the case of the unique Icarian anecdote seems to defy the kind of analysis pioneered by Kris and Kurz. What these two different, and relatively early, threads in the Euripidean biography do reveal is that many varieties of 'Euripides' roam through our ancient testimonia, and so together illustrate just how malleable a poet's biographical tradition could – and can still – be in the hands of creative interpreters.

A new Euripides, quickly forgotten

The first of these lesser known traditions transformed Euripides from the anti-democratic recluse of Aristophanic comedy (one thinks of *Acharnians*, *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Frogs*, amongst the surviving plays) into an ideal Athenian citizen – a true patriot and paragon of civic virtue. In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, 'Aeschylus' cast his rival 'Euripides' as a playwright who portrayed corrupted characters, and so corrupted the *demos* by these negative examples. This line of character assassination proves so successful in the course of the play that Dionysus, who had originally descended into Hades with the aim of retrieving Euripides, instead chooses to resurrect Aeschylus. Euripides is also portrayed here as an enormously popular (and populist) poet, whose loyal following includes not just Dionysus himself, but also the various and nefarious lowlifes of the Underworld.¹¹ In the century that followed the premiere of *The Frogs* in 405 BC, comic playwrights expanded and elaborated the commonplace of Euripides' 'democratic' appeal. As Filippomaria Pontani has persuasively shown, in the mid-fourth century the orators Aeschines and Demosthenes even drew oratorical battle lines against each other in terms that appear to have an intellectual and aesthetic genealogy in the great contest of *The Frogs*.¹²

Yet, and as I have discussed in detail elsewhere,¹³ a real tear in the fabric of Euripidean reception occurs with the great Athenian statesman Lycurgus, who departed radically from the old 'Aristophanic' tropes in his own presentation of Euripides to the Athenian public. As part of his cultural programme

for Athens, Lycurgus undertook – or at least served as a spokesman for – a dramatic reinvention of Euripides and reshaping of his Athenian legacy. By Lycurgus' time a story was already widespread that Euripides had lived out the last years of his life at the court of King Archelaus in Macedon.¹⁴ Euripides accordingly earned a reputation in his native city for harbouring tyrannical sympathies of the sort that were directly opposed to Athenian democracy. Nevertheless, in his single surviving oration (*Against Leocrates*) Lycurgus slyly and subtly reinvents the Euripidean biography by re-aligning the poet with the city's hallmark virtues and values.

In Lycurgus' hands, Euripides is for the first time transformed into a proud product and espouser of Athenian civic ideology.

If the transmitted speech is an accurate reflection of what took place in the courtroom, Lycurgus quoted a fifty-five-line monologue from Euripides' (now lost) *Erechtheus* (Euripides F 360 Kannicht) as part of his case against the defendant. In the monologue, Erechtheus' wife Praxithea adopts typical Athenian rhetoric to justify why she is willing to sacrifice her daughter to save the city of Athens from an outside attack.¹⁵ When he introduces this quotation, Lycurgus praises Euripides himself in starkly civic terms: he is to be commended not just for the beautiful poetry of Praxithea's verses, but for choosing so fine and ennobling a historical subject for the plot of one of his plays.¹⁶ Thus around 330 BC a significant, if ultimately fleeting, transformation took place when Euripides, relieved at last of his Aristophanic baggage, was momentarily reinvented as the paradigm of an Athenian. That reinvention lay at the heart of the 'Lycurgan' theatre programme in Athens, which involved a variety of theatre-related initiatives and moves to re-appropriate classical tragedy for the city. In this new version of Euripides, the comic verses that so obviously influence the *vitae* play only a backstage role, as rejected foil for the new image that Lycurgus endeavoured to create.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of the *vitae* and Euripides' ancient biography more generally, Lycurgus' attempts to recast Euripides represent something of a false biographical

start. Nowhere else in the surviving tradition is Euripides remembered, in the manner of Sophocles or Aeschylus (a heroic veteran of the Persian Wars), as a particularly committed Athenian citizen. Instead the *vitae* tend, inspired by Euripides' own poetry and the old comic poets' portrayals, to focus on his alleged misanthropy and civic reclusiveness (hardly an Athenian democratic ideal) as well as his alleged and self-imposed exile in Macedon – an exile that he embarked upon precisely because he was so abused by the comic poets and his fellow citizens at home in Athens. But by mining the very same *corpus* of Euripidean plays, Lycurgus was able to find 'proof' of the exact opposite about their author and his character in lines from the *Erechtheus*. Certainly, we all form our ideas about who poets *are* – especially poets whom we do not personally know – on the basis of their verses, and the case of Lycurgus demonstrates just how different a 'reader' he was of Euripidean verse than Aristophanes or the later *vitae* writers. But though essential to the groundwork of his theatre and culture programme, and so to enduring notions about the achievement of 'classical' Athens, Lycurgus' own radical reading and reinvention of Euripides seems not to have substantially affected Euripides' more general and enduring image. With the benefit of hindsight, it seems safe to say that it proved little more than a flash in the biographical pan.

The mushroom-gatherers of Icaria

Another unusual version of Euripides appears in one, in many ways out-of-the-way testimonium that likely dates to the third century BC, the century that also saw the flurry of literary-biographical research and writing by the scholar-poets in the Library at Alexandria. The fragment, attributed to Eparchides, is quoted by a banqueter in the second book of Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 2.61a–b). The passage appears in a section of the book where the symposiasts are discussing the virtues and varieties of mushrooms. The text and translation below are those of Constantakopoulou (2011), in *Brill's New Jacoby* (Eparchides 437 *BNJ* F 2):

Ἐπαρχίδης Εὐριπίδην φησὶ τὸν ποιητὴν ἐπιδημῆσαι τῇ Ἰκάρῳ, καὶ γυναικὸς τινος μετὰ τέκνων κατὰ τοὺς ἀγρούς, δύο μὲν ἄρρένων τελείων, μιᾷ δὲ παρθένου, φαγούσης θανασίμους μύκητας καὶ ἀποπνιγείσης μετὰ τῶν τέκνων, ποιῆσαι τοῦτ' ἐπίγραμμα·

ὦ τὸν ἀγήρατον πόλον αἰθέρος, Ἥλιε, τέμνων,
 ὅρ' εἶδες τοιόνδ' ὄμματι πρόσθε πάθος;
 μητέρα παρθενικὴν τε κόρην δισσοὺς τε συναίμους
 ἐν ταῦτ' ὧι φέγγει μοιραδίῳ φθιμένους.

Eparchides says that Euripides, the poet, stayed¹⁷ in Ikaros [i.e. Icaria]. When some woman, who with her children, two grown up males and one unmarried girl, ate deadly mushrooms in a field and died by asphyxiation along with her children, he (Euripides) wrote this epigram:

‘Oh, god of the sun, who travels the eternal vault of the
 sky,
 have you ever seen with your eyes such a woe?
 A mother and her maiden daughter, with two brothers,
 dead on the same fateful day’.

Eparchides seems to have been a local historian from (or at least of) Icaria, the island so-named because by some accounts Icarus took his fateful plunge just off the island's coast, into the ‘Icarian Sea’. The sole other surviving fragment of Eparchides (F 1) is also preserved by Athenaeus, and consists in a short disquisition on Icarian – or ‘Pramnian’ – wine (Pramnos is one of the names for the single, spiny mountain of the island, today usually known as Atheras). This wine, like the island itself, was ‘dry and harsh and of exceptional strength’ αὐστηρὸς καὶ σκληρὸς καὶ δύνναμιν ἔχων διαφέρουσα. In antiquity Icaria was indeed known as a rough and inhospitable place (it has no natural harbours), set in the waters of a notoriously dangerous part of the Aegean.¹⁸ An anonymous epigram of unknown date from Book 7 of the *Palatine Anthology* (a book dedicated to epitaphs and other sepulchral epigrams) well captures the strain of ancient sentiment about the island:¹⁹

Ἰκάρου ὦ νεόφοιτον ἐς ἡέρα πωτηθέντος
 Ἰκαρίη πικρῆς τύμβε κακοδρομῆς,
 ἀβάλε μήτε σε κείνος ἰδεῖν μήτ' αὐτὸς ἀνεῖναι

What's in a *Life*? Euripides

Τρίτων Αἰγαίου νῶτον ὑπὲρ πελάγευς.
οὐ γάρ σοι σκεπανή τις ὑφόρμισις οὔτε βόρειον (5)
ἔς κλίτος οὐτ' ἀγὴν κύματος ἔς νοτίην.
ἔρροις, ὦ δύσπλωτε, κακόςενε· σέϊο δὲ τηλοῦ
πλώοιμι, στυγεροῦ ὅσσον ἀπ' Ἀΐδεω.
A.P. 7.699

O Icaria, bitter sepulchre of the ill-fated journey
of Icarus who flew aloft in the new-travelled air,
If only he had never seen you, if only
Triton had never sent him up over the surface of the
Aegean.

For you have no sheltered place to anchor, neither on the
northern slope

Nor where the waves break on the south.

A curse on you, who are dangerous for sailors and
inhospitable.

May I sail as far from you as from abhorrent Hell.

As today, Icaria was in antiquity a remote and unconventional destination, and no other trace of a testimonium for Euripides' supposed voyage to the island survives. There are, however, other notices of the poet's travels, which are surprisingly wide-ranging and 'sociable' given his parallel reputation for isolation and misanthropy.²⁰ Aside from the well-known stories about Euripides' journeys to the court of King Archelaus in Macedon (the land where he was also said to have been buried),²¹ a passage in one of his *vitae* claims that, before moving to Macedon, he lived in Magnesia (the easternmost region of Thessaly). There he was granted the title of *proxenos* and awarded *ateleia* (exemption from taxes and/or duties owed to the state);²² other mentions of similar honours bestowed upon poets from the Hellenistic period onwards suggest that he (was thought to have) earned these distinctions by virtue of his poetry.²³ More in line with his hermitic reputation, Euripides was also remembered for having passed much time in a cave on his native island of Salamis, where he could brood and draw inspiration from the view of the sea, and generally avoid human interaction.²⁴

The epigram that Eparchides attributes to Euripides has been widely regarded as spurious; Wilamowitz minced no words when he also called it 'ein recht schlechtes Gedicht'.²⁵ In *Further*

Greek Epigrams Denys Page introduced the poem by identifying it as ‘pseudo-epitaph of the Hellenistic period, probably composed specially to add colour to the anecdote in which it is embedded’. He further observed that ‘it is indeed essential to read it in the context of the anecdote, for the epigram itself offers no clue to the cause of death’.²⁶ Page’s reading thus raises for us the chicken-or-egg question of Eparchides’ methodology: did he compose the epitaph, as Page suspects, to ‘add colour’ to the anecdote? Or did Eparchides invent the anecdote (as Wilamowitz postulated) to explain the context of an epitaph that makes no mention of poisonous mushrooms, and on its own gives no information about the family’s cause of death? (Wilamowitz insisted that nothing about the epigram is to be taken seriously.²⁷) The disagreement between Page and Wilamowitz as to ‘which came first’ serves to underscore just how conditioned we have become to seeing all ancient testimonia about the lives of poets as fictions, dependent on the poets’ works and the products of later overactive imaginations.²⁸ Eparchides’ anecdote does give us a nicely potted example of the direct link that ancient authors assumed between a poet’s experiences and his life: Euripides heard of a terrible event, and was inspired to write about it. But in this unusual case, the work at the heart of the anecdote – a short sepulchral epigram – is nowhere else attested, which leads us instinctively to dismiss both anecdote and epitaph as the fanciful invention of someone’s (perhaps Eparchides’ own) creative imagination.²⁹

The Icarian anecdote never gained enough purchase to be repeated in the Euripidean *vitae*, though (mis)readings of Athenaeus-Eparchides’ Greek have led to a curious epiphenomenon, a testament to the enduring productive power of the ancient poets’ biographies. In modern times scientific studies of mycology show the remarkable tendency of celebrating Euripides as the first writer to document mushroom poisoning and (even more extraordinarily) of claiming that the sepulchral epigram was actually a poem he wrote upon the deaths of his own wife and children. This oft-repeated interpretation appears, for example, in an abstract (for an article called ‘Mushroom Poisoning (Mycetismus): Report of Four Cases’)

published in the highly esteemed *Journal of the American Medical Association*: 'The earliest recorded instance of mushroom poisoning is that which occurred in the family of the Greek poet Euripides (fifth century, B.C.). Euripides' wife, two sons and a daughter died from this cause'.³⁰ Theodor Wieland, in the introduction to his more recent (2012) *Peptides of Poisonous Amanita Mushrooms*, notes that 'History tells of many prominent cases [of mushroom poisoning], e.g. of the eradication of Euripides' whole family, who in the poet's absence, partook of deadly toadstools'.³¹ Eparchides' anecdote about Euripides' activity on Icaria, though little-discussed amongst classicists (like Lycurgus' words on the poet in *Against Leocrates*, Eparchides' fragment does not appear in Kannicht's collection of testimonia), apparently leads a parallel life as a popular historical factoid in the mycologist community.

Of more interest here, however, is the challenge that the Eparchides fragment poses for Lefkowitz' conclusion that 'virtually all the material in all the lives is fiction', derived from the poets' own verses or else from the poets' depictions by the comic playwrights. By 'lives' here Lefkowitz primarily means the poetic *vitae*, but one effect of her work has been to cast comprehensive doubt upon the whole of the ancient biographical tradition surrounding literary figures. Thus nearly every preserved biographical detail today prompts us either to seek out its origins either in the poets' own work or else to follow Kris and Kurz and others in locating parallel anecdotes of the same 'type' in other traditions. After recounting Euripides' habit of passing time in his cave-study on Salamis, one of his *vitae* explains that 'Because of this he drew most of his comparisons from the sea'. Lefkowitz glosses the ancient biographer's own gloss: 'Here, what is given as the result of the story is in fact its origin: to explain why so many of Euripides' most beautiful lyrics describe the sea, it seemed reasonable to assume that he might have lived near the sea'.³² But the Eparchides passage proves a frustrating exercise in this methodology, as there is nothing obvious in Euripides' *surviving* works that seems to explain the account of his trip to Icaria (nor, for that matter, his sojourn in Magnesia³³) and no known

play of his weaves a plot that culminates in tragic death by mushroom poisoning. Nor do I know of similar anecdotes starring other Greek tragedians or poets. It may well be that Eparchides or his sources fabricated the story primarily to shed celebrity lustre on the island.

If, however, we were to go looking for the origins of Eparchides' story amongst the usual suspects, we might first suspect that it harkens back to the 'alimentary criticism' so common to ancient comedy: as Matthew Wright has observed, 'The comedians make use of food-related imagery more frequently than any other type of metaphor when talking about literature'.³⁴ One of the Euripidean *vitae* informs us that his mother, Cleito, was a vegetable-seller (a point of information already rejected in the fourth century BC by the Atthidographer Philochorus³⁵). David Roselli has discussed the clear comic pedigree of this particular detail: in a passage of *The Acharnians* Dicaeopolis asks Euripides for some chervil (σκανδικά, an herb similar to parsley) 'given to you by your mother' (μητρόθεν δεδεγμένος, 478); in *The Thesmophoriazusae* Euripides is outright described as the son of a vegetable-seller (λαχανοπωλήτρια, 387). Roselli interprets the trope by arguing that, in evoking the marketplace, the identification of Euripides' mother as a common vegetable-monger underscores the tendency of Euripidean characters to speak in a way altogether too 'common' for the dignified genre of tragedy.³⁶ Icaria was and has always been a poor island with a mainly subsistence economy, and Euripides' mushroom-gatherers might simply play into the Aristophanic depiction of Euripides as voice and representative of common people.

Alternatively, if we were to look for some connection between the mushroom anecdote and Euripides' known works, the *Bacchae* might seem the most likely text (the play did otherwise influence the Euripidean *vitae*: it seems responsible for the claims that Euripides either suffered or came close to his own Dionysiac *sparagmos*³⁷). Together Carl Ruck and anthropologist (and ethnomycologist) R. Gordon Wasson interpreted the maenads of Euripides' *Bacchae* as allegories for mushroom gatherers, who foraged for, harvested, then consumed 'children' (mushrooms in reality, but which

represented Dionysus himself) in the forest.³⁸ But by now it should be evident that this is all really something of a wild goose chase: by means of our own creative contortion of the evidence, we could probably find a passage in Aristophanes' or Euripides' own work to justify nearly any anecdote about him. In other words, hunting down the 'true origins' of stories about poets sometimes requires just as much imagination as we now tend to ascribe to the ancient biographers.

Will the real Euripides please stand up?

The hundreds of testimonia that survive for the life of Euripides and his life's later reception cannot be likened to scores of puzzle pieces or gleaming mosaic tesserae that, when fitted together, build a single picture of the poet. Euripides was, and continues to be, different things for different people: Lycurgus fashioned him in his own image as an exemplary citizen; for Eparchides he was a traveller, moved enough by a local tragedy on Icaria to dedicate a few lines of his inspired verse to mourning and commemorating it. Competing strains run the course of the tradition: in antiquity the poet was a misogynist; today he is celebrated for his sensitive explorations of gender and the plight of women.³⁹ In the *vitae* he is presented as a recluse; for the anonymous author of later antiquity's Euripidean *Epistles* he was a supportive colleague, who encouraged the dithyrambist Timotheus to ignore unfair criticisms of his work and consoled Sophocles on the loss of new plays to a shipwreck.⁴⁰ For some his poetry was a mouthpiece of an Athenian imperial project; today theatre directors and programme notes to productions of his plays champion him as a pacifist *avant la lettre*.⁴¹ Euripides thus comes in many, and sometimes mutually-contradictory guises: Lycurgus' Euripides would be the last to try to avoid a liturgy, just as much as Aristophanes' Euripides is anything but a personification of Athenian values. His figure is in many ways like a myth: by definition multiform, open to innovation in the hands of anyone from Aristotle to a modern mycologist. The *vitae* that today serve as the most ready source for his life and biography

are likewise not simply the distillations of the tradition, but rather other accounts of an-*other* Euripides.

Earlier in this volume, Barbara Graziosi presented us with three case studies of creative life-makers who used the biographies of ancient poets to shape their own life stories. Like Euripides, Homer has come in many different guises. To the ancient Greeks he was a poor blind bard; in medieval Baghdad he wore a turban and saw perfectly well.⁴² The unusual (from a classicist's perspective) case of Euripides the proto-mycologist is just one further testament to the power that these traditions still exert for different people today. In the winter of 2009 I myself even went looking for Euripides, or rather for Euripides' cave, on the island of Salamis.⁴³ Later, however, in the summer of 2014, Euripides found me on the island of Icaria. For more than a year I spent a series of long lonely months on that island, and with little else to do I turned to researching the sources for its ancient history. I was shocked to come across the Eparchides anecdote: I had worked for years on the biographical tradition for Euripides without ever alighting on this northern Aegean chapter. Mushrooms of course still grow on the island of Icaria, and the village where I was staying (Arethusa) also happens to be the home of the island's most famous mushroom-gatherer: an eccentric and self-proclaimed botanist (βοτανολόγος), a long-bearded and weathered man named Diamantis. On a chilly January day in the village's sole *kafeneio*, I told Diamantis about the story of Euripides' trip to the island and the family's death by mushrooms. He assured me that it takes an expert's knowledge to discern the poisonous mushrooms from the safe ones that grow in the forest on the mountain.

In the summer on Icaria I passed my own brooding hours staring out, like Euripides on Salamis, at the sea, wondering which play might somehow lurk behind the story. Was this, perhaps, the seed of the idea for the *Medea* – had that ancient Icarian mother somehow known that the mushrooms her children ate would prove fatal? The mushroom-gathering party – a mother, two children, a young girl and two men – seemed to map all too well onto the play's *dramatis personae* of Jason's family, with both Medea and the Corinthian royals.

Perhaps, though, I wondered, thinking back to Diamantis – perhaps there was a perfectly reasonable explanation for the anecdote. Eparchides might just have recorded the story simply because it was true.

Notes

- 1 See Christ (1990) esp. 167. Aristotle's anecdote is an illustration of how one might respond to slander.
- 2 Eur. *Hipp.* 612: ἡ γλῶσσ' ὁμώμοχ', ἡ δὲ φρήν ἀνώμοτος. The line quickly grew famous, and is quoted or alluded to at Ar. *Th.* 275–6; *Ran.* 101–2 and 1471; Pl. *Th.* 154d; cf. Avery (1968) esp. 22–5. On this and other legal trials in which Euripides was supposedly involved see Cagnazzi (1993).
- 3 *Arg.Eur.Hipp.* = DID C 13 Snell.
- 4 For a moment of Euripides actually accounting for himself in the theatre, see the dubious anecdote reported at Sen. *Epist.* 115.14–15: spectators stormed the stage (*totus populus ... consurrexit uno impetu*) after an actor delivered a speech in praise of acquiring wealth. Euripides supposedly leapt out into the middle of the crowd and explained that they needed to wait to see what would happen to the character (Bellerophon).
- 5 Chamaeleon fr. 40a Wehrli: ἃ δ' αὐτὸς ὁ τραγωδοποιὸς ἐποίει, ταῦτα τοῖς ἥρωσι περιέθηκε. For an overview of Satyrus' *Life of Euripides* from the perspective of the 'method' see Schorn (2004) 41–3. The most extensive overview of Chamaeleon and his method appears in Arrighetti (1987); see esp. 141–59 on its origins. See too Johanna Hanink and Richard Fletcher, Chapter 1.
- 6 Satyrus *Life of Euripides* fr. 39.9 (= Aristophanes F 694 K-A): οἱ[α] μὲν π[ο]εῖ λέγε[ι]ν | τοῖός ἐστιν. Though the speaker in Satyrus' biography attributes the line to Aristophanes himself, it was more likely uttered by one of his comic characters – it may also be a paraphrase of Ar. *Thes.* 149–50 (spoken by Agathon), another early formulation of the principles behind the 'Chamaeleontic method'. Hunter (2009) 105 distils the ancient approach to biography into the pithy motto 'you are what you write'.
- 7 Cf. also e.g. Pollux's claim (4.111) that Euripides occasionally composed *parabaseis* (à la Old Comedy), in which the chorus addressed the spectators through Euripides' *propria persona*. See too the discussion of Euripidean lyric in Satyrus' *Life of Euripides*: the speakers interpret the lyric as cyphers for Euripides' decision to leave Athens for Macedon (f. 39 cols. 17–18).
- 8 See especially Lefkowitz (1981).

- 9 T A1 IA-III Kannicht, all under the heading ἰ Γένος καὶ βίος Εὐριπίδου. See especially Lefkowitz (2012) on these and other later biographical texts.
- 10 See the recent edition and commentary of Schorn (2004).
- 11 Ar. *Ran.* 771–8; cf. the discussion by Hunter (2009) 10–17 and Hanink (2014) 170–1.
- 12 Pontani (2009); see also the discussion in Hanink (2014) 134–58.
- 13 Part I of Hanink (2014).
- 14 Aristotle himself preserves our first reference to the tradition of Euripides’ self-imposed ‘exile’ at Archelaus’ court in Macedon (Arist. *Pol.* 1311b30–4). For the testimonia (outside the *vitae*) see T 112–20 Kannicht; on the popularity of the story and for its sources see Hanink (2008).
- 15 Wilson (1996) 314 compares Praxitheia’s rhetoric to an Athenian *epitaphios logos*.
- 16 Cf. Hanink (2014) 40–53, where I argue that Lycurgus’ rhetoric consciously appropriates the language of Athenian honorific decrees.
- 17 Constantakopoulou renders ἐπιδηῆσαι as ‘went to stay’, though ‘stay’ captures the meaning (cf. *LSJ* s.v. ἐπιδημέω III ‘of foreigners, to stay in a place’). ‘Went to stay’ sounds odd if Eparchides was actually writing from Icaria.
- 18 On Icaria in antiquity see especially Papalas (1992) and Constantakopoulou (2007) 180–2; 261 (for the appearance of the cities of Oine and Therma, modern Campos and Therma, on the Athenian tribute lists). Ancient sources for the island are collected by Tsangas (2005); Matthaïou and Papadopoulos (2003) is an edition of the island’s known ancient inscriptions, while the volume edited by Koutsoflakis (2010) is a good repository of archaeological information.
- 19 See also *AP* 7.44 (by Theatetus) and 7.651 (by Euphorion), both of which are presumably epitaphs for cenotaphs of people who lost their lives near the island, in the tumultuous Icarian Sea.
- 20 Easterling (1994) gathers lines from Euripides’ plays which might have been meant to appeal to audiences outside of Athens; see now also Vahtikari (2014) 125–98 *passim*. On traditions that cast Euripides as a ‘wandering poet’ see Hanink (2010b).
- 21 See above n. 14.
- 22 *TrGF* 5.1 T IA 6.
- 23 On the phenomenon see Hunter and Rutherford (2009) 3–6; for further documentation see Guarducci (1929).
- 24 On the cave see below and Satyr. *Vit. Eur.* col. 9 and *Vita Euripidis* T A1 III.1 Kannicht. Karachalios (2006) 13–14 suggests that the conceit may have originated in Old Comedy; its first

- attestation is in a fragment of the fourth/third century Attidographer Philochorus *FGrH* 328 F 219.
- 25 Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1898) 32, n. 58. The sole other epigram ascribed to Euripides, Page *FGE* 155–6 lines 558–9, is also an epitaph, a collective epigram for the Athenians who died under the command of Nicias in the Sicilian Expedition. Page does not pronounce on the authenticity of these two lines, preserved at *Plu. Nic.* 17.4.
 - 26 Page *FGE* (1981) 156 II.
 - 27 Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1898) 32, n. 58: ‘Euripides steht als Verfertiger von Epigrammen so gut wie sonst Homer, Sappho, Archilochos: ernsthaft ist all das nicht zu nehmen’. (‘As an epigram-writer, Euripides is just as good as Homer, Sappho, Archilochus: it [i.e. the epigram] should not be taken seriously.’)
 - 28 A posthumous publication, Page’s *Further Greek Epigrams* appeared in the same year as the first edition of Lefkowitz’ *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (1981) (Page passed away in 1978).
 - 29 Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1898) finds the epigram and anecdote so bizarre as to wonder if Eparchides himself had not ingested some mushrooms: ‘Wir wissen aber gar nicht, ob nicht Eparchides selbst schwindelte’. (‘But we know not whether Eparchides himself was tripping.’)
 - 30 Vander Veer and Farley (1935).
 - 31 At 1. Bertelsen’s account in her *Mushroom: A Global History* (2013) is similarly colourful: she introduces the Euripides anecdote with the observation that ‘When it comes to mushrooms, not all is sweet cream and porcini’ (63). Pierre Bayle’s *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697) may offer the key to unlock the source of the misinformation (quotation from the (1737) English translation, at 147 s.v. ‘Euripides’):

The Writer who drew up the *Index* to Dalechamp’s Athenaeus says, that Euripides lost in one day, his wife, two sons and a daughter, and refers us to page 60, where nothing like this is found: but we find in page 61, that Euripides going to Icaria, wrote an Epigram on a disaster that happened at a peasant’s house, where a woman with her two sons and a daughter died by eating of mushrooms. Judge from this instance, what hazards those run who rely on Index-makers.

(Bayle’s observation here actually led him to propose that principles be drawn up for indexers, so Wheatley (1879) 21.) Jacques Dalechamp’s edition and translation of Athenaeus, *Deiponosophistarum libri XV*, was published in Lyon in 1583.

- 32 Lefkowitz (2012) 95 with n. 32.

- 33 Easterling (1994) 75 suggests that ‘we should perhaps be thinking of Euripides’ alleged Magnesia connexions’ in relation to mention of the Peneus River at *Trojan Women* 214, but the danger of reproducing the same circular thinking that we attribute to the ancient biographers is all too present in such cases.
- 34 Wright (2012) 129–39; quotation from 129; on the ‘flavour’ of Euripides see 134.
- 35 *FGrH* 328 F 218 = *TrGF* 5.1 T 3.1 Kannicht; cf. Lefkowitz (2012) 194, n. 1.
- 36 For this criticism see Roselli (2005) with bibliography; discussion of Euripides’ mother and the significance of the ‘vegetable seller’ conceit clusters at 7–28.
- 37 *TrGF* 5.1 T 1 II and IV 1 (respectively: Euripides was torn apart by wild dogs; women *wanted* to tear Euripides apart because of how he depicted them in his plays, but in the end did not); cf. Lefkowitz (2012) 98–9.
- 38 Ruck (1986); cf. also Gordon Wasson, Hofmann and Ruck (2008 [1978]) 51–3 (the maenads sought mushrooms with which to season wine) and 130–1; Gordon Wasson (1986). According to Plutarch’s *Table Talk* (*Quaestiones convivales*, *Mor.* 664b) some thought that mushrooms were actually created by thunder.
- 39 Euripides’ ‘feminism’ was identified in the popular media as early as Corbin (1918).
- 40 The standard edition of the letters is Gößwein (1975). On the Euripidean *persona* constructed by the author of the letters, likely a product of the ‘Second Sophistic’, see Hanink (2010a) with 548–51 on Euripides’ relationship with Timotheus and Sophocles.
- 41 To give but one example, an advertisement in *Broadway World* for a reading of *Hippolytus* (featuring Olympia Dukakis) in February 2015 offered these familiar-sounding remarks about the playwright: ‘he was a pacifist, a free thinker, and a humanitarian in an age when such qualities were increasingly overshadowed by intolerance and violence’, see www.broadwayworld.com/off-broadway/article/Olympia-Dukakis-and-More-Set-for-HIPPOLYTOS-Red-Bull-Theaters-Next-Revelation-Reading-216-20150209. Allan (2008) rightly observes that ‘The notion of Eur. the proto-pacifist or proto-imperialist is no more plausible than the comic caricature of Eur. the immoralist, misogynist, or atheist’ (6).
- 42 Graziosi (2015) explores the variety of portraits of Homer in the Arab, Italian and Byzantine traditions.
- 43 Hanink (2009) is an account of the trip.

CHAPTER 7

LIVES FROM STONE: EPIGRAPHY AND BIOGRAPHY IN CLASSICAL AND HELLENISTIC GREECE

POLLY LOW

Inscriptions of the classical and, especially, Hellenistic periods can be a rich source of information for those interested in reconstructing the details of the lives of statesmen, as well as the creative lives of poets and philosophers.¹ This is not, of course, a novel observation: the potential utility of inscriptions as a source for biography and biographers has been recognised since antiquity. But this turn to epigraphic evidence seems often to happen in spite of, rather than because of, the biographical qualities of the inscriptions themselves. Greek epigraphy of this period is a largely, even distinctively, non-biographical, and non-autobiographical, type of writing, not only in comparison with literary texts but also when contrasted with epigraphic material from other places and periods. There is no obvious classical Greek equivalent to a text such as Augustus' *Res Gestae*, or (looking to the east), the Bisitun inscriptions.² Greek epitaphs (with a few, rare, exceptions) fail to provide even the most basic biographical data about the individuals they commemorate: no dates of birth or death, no ages, very little information about positions held or activities undertaken.³ Classical Greek honorific decrees, again with a few exceptions, characteristically provide a rich store of abstract claims about the honorand's virtues, but almost no information about the actions or events in which those virtues were manifested.⁴

However, there is still some scope for exploring the connection between Greek epigraphic texts and ancient (and modern) biographical traditions, and the discussion which follows attempts to do this from two different directions. First (and more briefly) the ways in which ancient texts use and abuse epigraphic evidence in their attempts to create ancient lives will

be considered. The second part shifts the focus to the inscriptions themselves, exploring (and offering some explanations for) their rather arms-length relationship with biography. Finally, I offer a brief discussion of an apparently rule-proving exception: the inscriptions from the *Archilocheion* on Paros.

Epigraphic biography

Ancient authors quote or refer to inscriptions (both real and fictitious) in their texts for various reasons: to reinforce their arguments or rebut those of their rivals; to display their expertise; to add interest to their narrative; or simply because reference or allusion to inscriptions had become an expected part of the genre in which they were working.⁵ The use of inscriptions in ancient biography conforms to this general pattern, but a brief consideration of some of the specific ways in which ancient (literary) biographers exploited epigraphic material in their writing provides further insight into both the potential and the limitations of this sort of evidence.

In the Preamble to his *Life of Nicias*, Plutarch makes a strong claim for the value of epigraphy to his project (and for his own skills as an epigrapher).⁶

τὰ διαφεύγοντα τοὺς πολλοὺς, ὅφ' ἐτέρων δ' εἰρημένασποράδην ἢ πρὸς ἀναθήμασιν ἢ ψηφίσμασιν εὐρημένα παλαιοῖς πετεῖραμαι συναγαγεῖν, οὐ τὴν ἄχρηστον ἀθροίζων ἱστορίαν, ἀλλὰ τὴν πρὸς κατανόησιν ἡθους καὶ τρόπου παραδιδούς. (Plutarch, *Life of Nicias* 1.5)

Those things which have eluded most writers, and have been mentioned sporadically by others, or which are found on ancient dedications or decrees – these are what I have attempted to bring together, not piling up useless research, but handing on that which relates to the appreciation of manners and character.

Epigraphic evidence – the testimony of dedications and decrees – will not be primarily (or even at all) a source of factual information, but rather a way of establishing the more abstract qualities of the biographer's subject: their 'manners and character'. If ancient biography might (broadly) be summed up as an account of the 'deeds and character' of an

individual,⁷ it is the latter rather than the former for which inscriptions will (according to Plutarch) be a good source.

How, though, do inscriptions reveal character? Epigraphic texts are full of morally evaluative language, but that language is often so formulaic as to be more or less meaningless in establishing any 'true' picture of the subject's character or behaviour. Again, the *Nicias* offers a possible solution to this problem. When Plutarch uses epigraphic material in the *Life of Nicias* (something he does rather less often than his preface might lead the reader to expect), he generally seems relatively uninterested in the precise content of the inscriptions he mentions, focussing instead on the fact of their existence, and the implications of that fact: inscriptions provide evidence of actions, and those actions give evidence of character. So, for example, Nicias' dedicatory offerings on the Acropolis give evidence of his expenditure on choregic competition, and therefore of Nicias' lack of eloquence and desire to persuade people by his generosity (3.3); an inscription from Delos (recording his benefactions there and 'the many blessings which [the Delians] should beseech for Nicias from the gods')⁸ is evidence either for Nicias' profligacy (once more), or possibly for his piety (4.1).

A similar methodology is visible in other lives. In the *Titus Flamininus*, for example, Plutarch quotes verbatim two remarkably uninformative dedications made by the city of Chalcis to the Roman general.⁹ These inscriptions become useful as evidence only when Plutarch can add the detail that they were attached to the 'largest and most beautiful' votive offerings ever set up by the people of Chalcis and therefore provide proof of an unprecedented level of gratitude towards Flamininus (*TF* 16.3). Conversely, in the *Life of Otho* an equally bland inscription (Otho's epitaph, quoted at 18.1) is made interesting by the fact that it fits into a wider context of the modest, low-key nature of Otho's death and commemoration. For Plutarch, then, it seems as if the content of an inscription alone does not straightforwardly reveal something about the nature of the man it commemorates; further analytical work is required to extract even character from it, still

more to construct biography. To put that in more positive terms, even the most apparently unpromising epigraphic text can become something of biographical interest.

This approach can be seen in other texts too, including those concerned with poets and philosophers. The *Vita* of Aeschylus records (or purports to record) what is probably the most well-known epigraphic record of an ancient creative life, the funerary epigram which the people of Gela allegedly set up in honour of the poet:

Αἰσχύλον Εὐφορίωνος Ἀθηναῖον τόδε κεύθει
μνημα καταφθίμενον πυροφόροιο Γέλας·
ἄλκην δ' εὐδόκιμον Μαραθῶνιον ἄλσος ἂν εἴποι
καὶ βαθυχαίτης Μῆδος ἐπιστάμενος.¹⁰

This monument covers Aeschylus the Athenian, son of Euphorion, who perished in wheat-bearing Gela. The grove of Marathon and the long-haired Mede know and could speak of his glorious courage.

The epigram itself does not reveal much about the poet's career. Its most infamous feature, in fact, is its failure even to mention Aeschylus' literary achievements, focussing instead on only two episodes in his life: his participation at the battle of Marathon, and his death in exile at Gela. But, as with the Plutarchan epigraphic material, the simple existence of this monument can be used to highlight some key themes in Aeschylus' life (which are also recurring themes in other poetic lives): exile from his native city; true recognition coming only after death, in a foreign land.¹¹ Its concentration on the poet's service at the battle of Marathon highlights a contrast between Aeschylus' loyalty to his city and Athens' rejection of the poet, which again fits nicely into the story of his life.¹²

The authenticity of Aeschylus' epitaph is disputed. In both content and style it is a reasonable approximation of a genuine inscribed monument,¹³ but it is possible that it should be seen as an example of an alternative response to the challenges posed by uncooperative epigraphic evidence, namely fabrication. This approach is certainly visible in many other *Lives* of ancient poets: epitaphs and epigrams typically appear in these

works as a convenient way of closing a narrative and summarising the qualities of the subject, and it is the very neatness with which they fulfil this role, together with the paucity of comparable documents in the epigraphic record, which can make it hard to believe that many (or any) of these texts ever existed as real inscriptions.¹⁴ The epitaph of Homer reported in several versions of the Homeric *Vita*, for example, is an obvious epigraphic absurdity but it performs a useful purpose in its context, rounding off the narrative of the poet's life, summing up his poetic achievements (he was the 'marshal', or 'one who adorned' heroic men: ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων κοσμήτορα) and, in those versions of the story in which the epitaph is said to have been composed by Homer himself, acting as a final gesture towards his artistic credentials.¹⁵

Epigraphic fabrication in the interest of biography is not restricted to poetic lives, nor to the invention of epitaphs. Diogenes Laertius' *Life of Zeno*, for example, quotes at length an honorific decree for the philosopher, purportedly voted by the Athenians in 262/1 or 261/0, which perfectly (for Diogenes' purposes) illustrates both Zeno's status among the Athenians and the beneficial effect of his philosophical teachings on the young men of the city:

ἐπειδὴ Ζήνων Μνασέου Κιτιεύς ἔτη πολλὰ κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν ἐν τῇ πόλει γενόμενος ἔν τε τοῖς λοιποῖς ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς ὧν διετέλεσε καὶ τοὺς εἰς σύστασιν αὐτῷ τῶν νέων πορευομένους παρακαλῶν ἐπ' ἀρετὴν καὶ σωφροσύνην παρῶρμα πρὸς τὰ βέλτιστα, παράδειγμα τὸν ἴδιον βίον ἐκθεῖς ἅπασιν ἀκόλουθον ὄντα τοῖς λόγοις οἷς διελέγετο . . .

Since Zeno of Kition, son of Mnaseus, has for many years continued to be a good man in the city in his philosophy and in other matters, and has exhorted those young men who have associated with him towards virtue and temperance, directing them towards the best, and providing in his own life a paradigm for all in consistency with his own teaching . . . (Diogenes Laertius 7.10.8–13)

Matthias Haake has convincingly argued that this inscription must be an invention (created probably not by Diogenes but by one of his sources, Apollonius of Tyre), above all because this sort of praise of intellectual activity is alien to Athenian (and Greek) honorific decrees of this time. There are no extant

examples of honorific decrees for philosophers from Athens in this period,¹⁶ and the very few examples from other cities show a significantly different approach to praising their subjects. A Boeotian decree for an un-named philosopher awards him the status of *proxenos* because of his services in teaching the city's ephebes:

[... ἐπιδιδέει *name*]τεῖς Ξενοκράτιος Μακε-
δῶν ἕως *city* φιλόσοφος παρεπιδαμίων
[πάρ' ἡμῶν ἀκροάσις πλίσιοις] ποιησάμενος, εὐδό-
[κίμεισε κῆ ἐν τῷ γυμνασίῳ σχολάζδδων τῶς
[ἐφείβως πηδεύει κῆ σεμ]νῶς ἀστρέφεται ἐν τῇ π[ό]-
[λει, δεδόχθη τῷ δήμῳ, πρόξ]ενον εἶμεν κῆ εὐεργέτα[ν]
[τῶς πόλιος Ἀριαρτίῳ ...] (Fossey 1994: 52–3, lines 3–9 ≈ IG VII 2849)

Since —teis the Macedonian, son of Xenocrates, has been present in [the city] as a philosopher, and has given many lectures to us, and was highly esteemed, and both educated the ephebes with teaching in the gymnasium and conducted himself nobly in the city, it seemed good to the city that he should be a *proxenos* and benefactor of the city of Haliartus.¹⁷

Exactly what the youth of Haliartus learnt from this philosopher is, apparently, of little interest; the fact that he has served the city is the key point, and justification enough for the honours granted.¹⁸ In the honours for Zeno, by contrast, the philosopher and his teachings are allowed a much more prominent place: the philosopher himself serves as a *paradeigma* to his pupils (an unusually, and suspiciously, philosophical use of the term in an epigraphic context).¹⁹ It is Zeno's central role in the text – he, not Athens, emerges as the model of good behaviour – which makes this alleged inscription, on the one hand, a useful piece of ammunition for the biographer and, on the other, so unlike any extant inscribed honorific decree that its authenticity is hard to credit.

Thus although the practice of ancient literary biographers might initially seem to contradict the non-biographical view of Greek epigraphy with which this piece began, it also in some ways confirms it. The content of inscriptions alone is not enough for the creation of biography, either because inscriptions inconveniently fail to provide the evidence required, or because that evidence is too bland, ambiguous, or (as in this

last example) primarily interested in something other than the details of an individual's life or work. It is only when further analytical or creative pressure is applied to inscribed texts that they become a suitable source for biography.

Biographical epigraphy?

There are, however, some (real) inscriptions which have a slightly stronger claim to function as a variety of biography. It is worth emphasising at the outset that this move from texts to stone also entails a move away from the commemoration of 'intellectual' achievements: as has already been noted, activities relating to poetry and philosophy are very rarely mentioned in the inscriptions of this period, except where those activities have a direct impact on the wellbeing of the *polis*. Nevertheless, the epigraphic record can provide some insight into the ways in which other sorts of careers, particularly those of statesmen, could be constructed and represented in inscribed form, and helps illustrate two themes which will be helpful when we finally (in the last section of this chapter) encounter an epigraphic biography proper. The first of these themes has already been noted: the extent to which the concerns of the *polis* shape the form and content of any epigraphic commemoration of the life and works of an individual. The second is a new development, and one which is particularly important as background to the inscribed biography of Archilochus: that is, a distinct shift, towards the end of the third century, in the amount of detail which is included in inscribed texts, particularly inscribed honorific decrees. The reasons for this change are complex, but one of its results is very relevant to the subject under discussion here: with more detail comes a heightened focus on the actions and achievements of the individual – an important step towards (if not, perhaps, entirely into) biographical epigraphy.

The relevant material falls into two broad categories: single honorific decrees which discuss an individual's career in detail, and collections ('dossiers') of epigraphic material which collate various events from an individual's life into a single monument.

It might be argued that all honorific decrees are a variety of biographic text, in that they share with much biographical writing an interest in cataloguing and recording the virtues of their subject.²⁰ But in most honorific decrees the resemblance never becomes more than fleeting, at best. Greek honorific decrees of the classical period regularly, and formulaically, list the abstract virtues of the honorand, and although it is likely that there is some correlation between the formulae chosen and the nature of the actions being honoured, it is usually almost impossible to recover any of the details of those actions. An early, but quite typical, example can be found in an Athenian decree (of 412/11) which honours Eurytion of Orchomenos and his father:

ἐπειδὴ

Εὐρυ[τ]ίων καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ Ποταμόδωρος καὶ οἱ [π]-
 ρόγονοι αὐτῶν πρόξενοί τε εἰσιν Ἀθηναίων κ[αί]
 [εὖε]ργέται καὶ ἄνδρες ἀγαθοὶ ἔν τε τῇ σ[.6...]
 [..9..]τ[.] τὴν πόλιν τὴν Ἀθηναίων κ[.7.]
 [..] ἔσιν καὶ ἰδίαι καὶ δημοσίαι τῷ δήμῳ τῷ-
 ἰ Ἀθηναίων, ἔπει[νέσαι ...]στ[...15....]
 ἰοσιν ἔναι τε αὐτοῖς21.....]
 ν ἀνδραγαθίας ο[.....25.....]
 κατὰ τὸν πόλεμον[ν24.....] (IG I³ 97, lines 5–14)

Since Eurytion and his father Potamodorus, and their ancestors, are *proxenoi* and benefactors of the Athenians, and are good men . . . to the city of the Athenians in private and in public to the *demos* of the Athenians, praise . . . for their *andragathia* . . . in the war

These men are ‘good men’ (*andres agathoi*: line 8), and also exemplify the abstract (and hard to translate) virtue of *andragathia*: ‘bravery’ or ‘manly virtue’ (line 13).²¹ The decree does refer to an event during the war (lines 14 f.) in which these qualities were presumably demonstrated: the decision to honour these men for ‘bravery’ is not, therefore, completely arbitrary. But the reader of the text is given no details of exactly how that *andragathia* was manifested: the state of the stone makes it impossible to know what exactly was said about the honorands’ actions in the war, but the fact that it only took a line and a half to say it

surely suggests that only minimal, if any, information was provided.

From the 320s BC, however, some honorific decrees move away from this compressed style and start to include a much longer, more detailed ‘motivation’ clause (the part of the honorific decree which explains why the honours were awarded).²² The listing of general, abstract virtues does not disappear but is supplemented by an extended narrative of the events which have prompted the creation of the honour – a narrative which often stretches back many years, and sometimes extends as far as the activities of the honorand’s ancestors.

This apparently abrupt shift from compression to verbosity is an important development in Athens’ epigraphic habit, and in its political and honorific culture.²³ Before attempting to get to grips with it in more detail, though, it is important to acknowledge that the move to the longer form of motivation clause is not universal. Not all honorands qualify for the more extensive account of their actions: this longer form of honorific decree seems to be restricted only to those Athenians awarded *megistai timai*, the ‘highest honours’, and to those whose actions have primarily benefitted Athens itself (rather than the Macedonians who controlled the city in this period).²⁴ Individual attention is itself, then, an individualised, targeted phenomenon. It is also worth noting the striking lack of ‘formulaic-ness’ in these longer motivation clauses. Both of these points emerge particularly clearly in the set of (about twenty) decrees proposed by Stratocles in the last decade of the fourth century.²⁵ Many of these texts are very fragmentary and so need to be treated with some caution, but, even so, there is little sign that Stratocles had anything approaching a standard template of honorific decree which he simply rolled out whenever needed. Rather, the terms of praise and the selection (and extent) of supporting detail are shaped to fit each individual case. There is even some sign of some unusually emotive language, when the situation demands it: in Stratocles’ decree honouring Lycurgus (*IG* II² 457) the reader is given an unexpected insight into the fragile state of Athenian nerves in the early years of Alexander’s reign, ‘when fears and great dangers

surrounded the Greeks' (φόβων καὶ κιδύνων μεγάλων τοὺς Ἕλληνας περιστάντων) – an extremely rare reference to 'fear' in an Athenian inscription.²⁶ These decrees are not, in other words, simply being churned out *en masse*, and loosely adapted to fit the specific circumstances of each honorand, but can legitimately be seen as personalised, individualised creations. To that extent, therefore, the initial impression which they give of indicating a heightened interest, or willingness, to commemorate, not just the abstract moral qualities but also the concrete actions of specific, differentiated individuals is not misleading.

The change is not only one of detail but also of focus, and above all of chronological focus. Honorific decrees are always to some extent interested in shaping future behaviour, whether on the part of those honoured (who should feel obliged to perform similarly praiseworthy actions in the future) or more widely among those who read the inscribed decree (and were thus encouraged to emulate the behaviour of the honorands).²⁷ But while the shorter honorific decrees give more or less equal space and emphasis to past services (summed up in the motivation clause) and future benefits (often expressed in the hortatory formula), the balance of these longer decrees is significantly different. The extremely lengthy decree honouring Callias of Sphettos, for example (*SEG* 28.60) devotes sixty-four lines to discussion of his previous benefactions to the city, compared to only six lines summing up his current (and potential future) services. The honours for Phaedrus of Sphettos (*IG* II³ I, 985) speak only about his completed achievements, and the emphasis on the past which is visible in this decree is made even stronger by the fact that it opens with a survey of the activities of Phaedrus' ancestors (lines 1–18).²⁸ It is likely that the (posthumous) honours for Lycurgus similarly began by praising the behaviour of his father and grandfather.²⁹ This focus on ancestors tips the chronological focus of the motivation section of an honorific decree still further back into the past, and in doing so, produces a monument whose effect is importantly different from that of earlier decrees: it is less explicitly driven by the day-to-day political practice of the whole community and more concerned with providing

memorials to the past activity of specific individuals and their families.³⁰

This increased focus on the individual and his family must be shaped, at least in part, by a change in the process by which these monuments were created. There are various reasons to suspect that the honorand, or the honorand's family, might have provided at least some of the material for the motivation clauses of these decrees. In the decree for Callias, for example, it has already been noted that the section describing his past achievements is significantly longer than the account of his current activities, which are skated over in just six lines. Moreover, those six lines are, as Shear noted in his original publication, expressed 'in vague and formulaic terms in comparison with the unusually fulsome detail used in describing his other services'.³¹ How could that disparity in detail be explained? Shear must be right to reject the suggestion that Callias' recent actions had been less successful than his earlier ones, and were deemed less worthy of detailed description.³² (More generally, any attempt to equate detail of description in these texts with sincerity of gratitude is probably misguided.) A preferable explanation might be to envisage a situation where the honorand provided the proposer with an account of his achievements – an account which formed the basis of the detailed narrative of the motivation clause – which the proposer then supplemented with some generic, formulaic comments of his own choosing. If this is correct, then what is visible in these motivation clauses is a sort of covert autobiography.³³ While the honorific decree's increasingly retrospective focus (in its presentation of the relationship between honorand and city) created the conditions in which a detailed account of the honorand's activities became appropriate, the fact that the honorand might be involved in shaping the content of his own honorific decree provided the mechanism by which that detailed information, particularly the information relating to family history, could be provided.

These honorands could, therefore, shape their own commemoration to some extent. But can the texts which emerged from this process really be classed as (auto)biography?³⁴ There

is certainly some overlap: events (or some events) from an individual life, in chronological order, with (in the decree's purpose clause) a moral to be learnt from it. But there is a danger of over-stating the importance of the individual in these texts, and, in doing so, exaggerating their biographical nature. The motivation clause can be seen as (in origin, at least) the work of the honorand, but that clause sits in a frame whose form is still determined by the *polis*.

This might help to explain the slight disjunction which emerges in these decrees between the focus of the motivation clause and the comments made in the publication clause. Publication clauses often provide justification for the inscription of the decree to which they are attached, but the phrasing of this clause in, for example, the decree honouring Euphron of Sicyon does not imply that it is the details of his actions which are the key thing in the text: the purpose of the decree is to provide a record, not of the benefits conferred on Athens, but of the benefits conferred by the city in return:

ὅπως ἂν εἰδῶσι πάντες, [ὅτι ὁ δῆμ]-
 ος ὁ Ἀθηναίων, ἔάν τις εὖ ποιήσει αὐτὸν οὐ μόνον αὐτ[ο]-
 ὺς τοὺς ποιήσαντας ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς τῶν εὐεργετῶν παῖ-
 δας οἶεται δεῖν τιμᾶν καὶ μεμνησθαι ὧν ἂν εὖ πάθῃ (*IG* II² 448, lines 81–4)

So that all may know that the people of Athens, when a good deed is done to it, believes it must honour not only the benefactors but their children as well and remember the benefactions it has received.

Benefactors need to know the likely consequences of their actions, and this is what the reader of this text is intended to learn. That readers also learn from, and emulate, the precise form of those actions is, it seems, rather less essential.³⁵ In other words, the view that the detail provided in the motivation clause is intended to provide a sort of template of euergetism for potential Athenian benefactors, or even that it is meant to serve as a more general source of moral exempla (comparable in intention, that is, to some literary political biography),³⁶ cannot quite be supported by the wider context of these clauses. Any readers of, for example, the inscribed honours for Euphron of Sicyon (*IG* II² 448) who got half way

through the text and thought they were reading an account of Euphron's heroic life would (or should) find themselves set straight by the closing lines of the decree. The take-home message in this decree, just as in the shorter decrees of the classical period, is intended to be one of Athenian generosity. And because the giving of gifts in a reciprocal relationship is a symbol of power, the inscription is also a sign of Athenian status.

In fact, the reader who had been paying attention would probably have reached that conclusion even before (s)he got to a decree's publication formula. Again, the honours for Euphron illustrate this point well. The account of Euphron's achievements is highly selective, and the selection has been made with an eye to actions which have particular relevance to the city of Athens and to the agenda of the Athenians at the moment when these honours were decreed. The nature of the regime which Euphron established in Sicyon is, in this context, of little interest; what is important is the fact that the regime-change enabled a change of Sicyonian policy towards Athens (*IG* II² 448, lines 45–9). Euphron's death is, admittedly, allowed to be partially (but only partially) driven by his love for his own city (lines 53–6), but it is allowed to hog the limelight only briefly before the action returns to Athens, and to the fate of the previous (Athenian) decree in Euphron's honour (lines 57–62). The destruction of that decree becomes the culmination of the narrative of the motivation clause, something which has seemed sufficiently odd to modern readers that an attempt has been made to explain it away by arguing (1) that the decree was amended after Euphron's death, and (2) that a clumsy attempt to conceal the amendment within the main text has resulted in the strange narrative structure which we see here.³⁷ And yet this arrangement of information is not really out of keeping with the general 'Athenocentricity' of the document as a whole. It looks odd only if we expect this text to be more interested in Euphron than it is in Athens.

The fact that the *polis*, not the individual, remains the most important thing in inscribed honorific decrees is illustrated even more clearly in the case of the honours for Phaedrus of

Sphettos (*IG II³* 1, 985). It might be tempting to see this text as purely Phaedrus' creation: the honours go into extreme detail about his achievements (which take up forty-six lines of the 101-line text) and the initiative for passing these honours came explicitly, in this case, from the honorand himself (lines 94 f.).³⁸ But even if Phaedrus might have exercised some control over the text up to the point at which it was inscribed on stone, that control did not last. At some point around 200 BC certain episodes of his brilliant career were chiselled out of the motivation clause (at lines 37–8, 40–1, 42–4 and 47–52), almost certainly because the events described in those lines pointed towards a relationship with the Antigonid rulers of Athens which it was no longer deemed appropriate to commemorate or celebrate.³⁹ In terms of Athens' shifting political interests this erasure makes perfect sense. In terms of the account of Phaedrus' career, however, these erasures create nonsense. Even if the past is allowed a larger role in this form of honorific decree, then, it is still ultimately subordinate to the concerns of the present, and the commemoration of individual achievements, likewise, always remains subordinate to the promulgation of the *polis*' own agenda.⁴⁰

There was an alternative way in which an individual might construct an epigraphic account of his career, and it is a method which takes us back to something closer to the Plutarchan approach to epigraphic biography: that is, to construct evidence of character (and evidence for actions) not so much from actions themselves as from the existence of inscriptions commemorating those actions. The added twist in this case is that the construction itself takes an epigraphic form.

The most striking example of this approach appears in the commemoration of the political career of Lycurgus. As mentioned above, Lycurgus does receive an epigraphic memoir, of sorts, in the decree posthumously voted in his honour, a decree which sums up the achievements of his ancestors and catalogues his services (political and financial) to the city. But this was not his only epigraphic legacy. According to the pseudo-Plutarchan *Life* of Lycurgus, the orator took steps to create his own inscribed memorial:

πάντων δ' ὧν διώκησεν ἀναγραφὴν ποιησάμενος ἀνέθηκεν ἐν στήλῃ πρὸ τῆς
ὑπ' αὐτοῦ κατασκευασθείσης παλαίστρας, σκοπεῖν τοῖς βουλομένοις ([Plutarch],
Lives of the Ten Orators 843f5–8)

He had a record made of all of his achievements and set it up on a *stèle* in front of the palaestra which he had built, so that all who wished could see it.

This story should probably be treated with some caution: there is (to my knowledge) no attested example from this period of this sort of inscribed document,⁴¹ and the fact that this monument sounds suspiciously *Res Gestae*-like might lead to the suspicion that some subliminal Romanisation has crept into the narrative here, in spite of the monument's authentically Athenian-sounding publication formula.⁴² Rather more secure is the reference to another form of epigraphic memorial which appears in the literary version of Lycurgus' posthumous honorific decree (*Vit. X. Or.* 852E6–9): according to this text, it was decided that all of Lycurgus' decrees were to become (or remain?) valid, and were to be re-inscribed and placed on the Acropolis.⁴³ The result would be to create a sort of epigraphic highlights-package of Lycurgus' political successes.

The idea of commemorating a career through a compendium of inscriptions is attested in the extant epigraphic record too. One example survives in Rhodes-Osborne 95 (*IG* II³ I, 367), a series of honours for Heraclides of Salamis. These are preserved as a dossier of honorific decrees and *probouleumata* (preliminary resolutions of the Council), all inscribed on a single stele (slightly over one metre high: 1.04 x 0.37). The decrees themselves are not particularly informative, although they do provide some snapshots of Heraclides' activities (in particular, his generosity in securing Athens' grain supply).⁴⁴ What they certainly do not do – in contrast to the honours for Euphron, Callias or Phaedros – is give any sense of diachronic progression through Heraclides' life and works. Instead, the decrees return repeatedly to the same set of actions, re-iterating, and thereby reinforcing, the services performed by Heraclides (and the honours received in return).⁴⁵ As an account of Heraclides' career, or even of his actions, this inscription is a disaster: it is repetitious, badly structured and confusing. But as

an unobtrusive monument to Heraclides' character – his *philotimia*, his *eunoia*, and so on – it is surely very effective.

It is, then, possible to see some biographical developments in classical and (particularly) Hellenistic Greek epigraphy; or, perhaps better, it is possible to see some epigraphic developments which, while probably not driven by a specifically 'biographical' urge, do make it easier to tell a story of an individual's life on the basis of the epigraphic record. But these lives are still primarily political, in two senses. The first is one which has already been noted: that is, that the concerns of the *polis* remain paramount, both in shaping the way in which an individual's actions might be recorded, and in deciding which of those actions to record at all. For something to be worth remembering, it must have benefitted the city in some way. Second, the subjects of these texts are still, almost exclusively, those who are depicted as having contributed to the political wellbeing of the city; indeed, there seems to be almost a positive reluctance to discuss non-political achievements in these texts (something most clearly visible in the lengthy honorific decree for the Athenian comic poet Philippides (*IG* II³ 1, 877), from which it would be absolutely impossible to know that this individual ever composed a single line of verse).

This second rule – the avoidance of the commemoration of intellectual achievement – is not absolute, as the example discussed in the last section here will show; but my final example also, I suggest, illustrates the pervasive influence of my first rule, that is, the impossibility of separating the representation of individual lives from their political context.

An inscribed creative life: the case of Archilochus

My final example provides probably the best example of biographical writing in the epigraphic material of this period, and also – at last – gives us a case of the epigraphic representation of a properly 'creative' life. The example consists of two substantial inscribed monuments from Paros, both of which record versions of the life of the poet Archilochus. One monument was set up by Mnesiepes, probably in the middle of the

third century; the other, of the early first century, was produced by a certain Sosthenes.⁴⁶ It is generally (and reasonably) assumed that both monuments stood in an *Archilocheion* in Paros, although neither text was found *in situ* (and the precise location, and date, of the Archilochus *heroon* is unknown).⁴⁷ The inscriptions share some common features: both talk about Archilochus' services to the Parians, especially his military service; both also draw on Archilochus' own poetry as a source (and validation) for their accounts, interlacing their narrative with quotations from his works.

There are, though, some differences of both method and content between the two texts. Sosthenes' inscription is explicitly based on another source, the annalistic account of the local historian Demeas (A.I, lines 1f, 7–9),⁴⁸ who wrote 'not only about Paros, but also about those things done by Archilochus' (οὐ μόνον περὶ Πά[ρου, ἀλλὰ καὶ | περὶ ὧν πέπ[ρακται ὑπὸ Ἀρχιλόχου: A.I, lines 1–2). The equal billing accorded to the poet and his city in the inscription's opening lines is in keeping with the general tone of the text which (insofar as it is possible to tell, given its very fragmentary state) maintains a close focus on events which illustrate Archilochus' relationship with the city of Paros. The opening summary of the inscription's (and Demeas') coverage draws attention to its recording of 'Archilochus' reverence [towards all the gods], and his [devotion] to his homeland' (τῆς Ἀρχιλόχ[ου] περὶ πάν|τας τοὺς θεοῦς εὖς<ε>βείας καὶ τῆς περὶ τὴν πατ[ρίδα] σπουδῆς . . .]: A.I, lines 2–4); the final word of the text is 'Paros' (B.VII, line 21).⁴⁹ Archilochus' achievements (and Sosthenes' service in commemorating them)⁵⁰ are therefore placed firmly in their civic context. Nor does the Parian focus disappear in the main body of the text. The annalistic structure of Demeas' account (with dating made by reference to Parian archon-years), and the repeated appeal to Archilochus' poetry as proof of the truth of that account,⁵¹ give the impression that Demeas (and Sosthenes) were at least, if not more, interested in providing a history of Parian achievements than of Archilochus' life.

The style and content of Mnesiepes' monument, however, are quite different, both from Sosthenes' text and from other

‘biographical’ inscriptions of the third century. The extant portion of the text opens with a report of three oracular responses approving the establishment of the cult of Archilochus;⁵² the inscription then turns to a narrative of the poet’s life which, unlike that of Sosthenes, is concerned not just with Archilochus’ services to the city, but also the more personal elements of his life-story. Notable among these is the explanation for Archilochus’ poetic inspiration: an encounter with the Muses, an endorsement from the Delphic Oracle (E₁ II, lines 20–57). Certainly, there is still a strong Parian element to this text. In fact, the inclusion of more details from Archilochus’ early life could be motivated by a desire to anchor the poet (and the reasons for his success as a poet) more firmly in a Parian context (and thereby give Paros the credit for producing such a man).⁵³ What is different is the way in which this civic connection is allowed to remain implicit, and Archilochus (rather than his city) is allowed to become the main focus of the story. The resulting narrative is something which is much closer to the *Lives* of poets which appear in literary texts than to conventional epigraphic texts. Indeed, various commentators have noted that Mnesiepes’ account conforms closely to the conventions and patterns of the genre of the literary *Life* in its blend of quasi-autobiographical detail (derived from the subject’s own poems) and recurring *topoi*.⁵⁴

Can the strangeness (in epigraphic terms) of Mnesiepes’ text be explained? Exact parallels are hard to find, but there are some partial similarities with other inscribed monuments (from this period and/or this place) which might help to provide some sort of background. First of all, the religious function of the text deserves emphasis. Although it has typically been read and interpreted as a piece of biography (and a biography of a real individual), one clear purpose of Mnesiepes’ narrative is to provide both aetiology and legitimation for a religious cult of Archilochus. This is something which is relatively well attested in the epigraphic record. *I. Magnesia* 16 (208/7), for example, provides a narrative of the foundation of the cult of Artemis Leukophyrena at Magnesia, again with reference to the Delphic Oracle; *I. Magnesia* 17 (c. 221/20), part

of a narrative of Magnesian history, reports in full a number of oracular responses relating to the city's foundation.⁵⁵ If read as a religious rather than a biographical document, then, Mnesiepes' inscription might perhaps start to seem, if not absolutely run of the mill, at least less of an anomaly.

The specific epigraphic culture of Paros is also worth considering. An obvious parallel case of an extended narrative inscription is the *Marmor Parium*, a monument which is probably almost contemporary to Mnesiepes' inscription.⁵⁶ The similarities between the two texts are strong enough to have prompted the suggestion that they both stood in the *Archilocheion*, forming part of a complex of inscribed accounts of the island's myths and history – a plausible, if unprovable, theory.⁵⁷ In any case, the *Marmor Parium* does suggest the existence on Paros in this period of an epigraphic tendency, or even epigraphic habit, of producing extensive inscribed monuments to historical (or quasi-historical) events, and also provides a parallel case of literary texts influencing the content and style of inscribed monuments.⁵⁸ In addition, its breadth of coverage, which includes intellectual developments alongside more conventional political history, again provides, if not an exact analogue for, at least a broad parallel to Mnesiepes' fusion of poetic biography (and poetic quotation) with political and religious history.⁵⁹ The prominence of the details of poetic lives throughout this text is indeed striking: when the Parians think of the past, it seems, and when they try to give chronological shape to that past, the lives and works of poets provide a clear point of reference.⁶⁰ Although, therefore, the Mnesiepes monument remains something of an oddity, particularly when considered as 'epigraphic biography', it is an oddity whose appearance in this place, and at this time, is not entirely incomprehensible.

Conclusion

'Biographisches ist überall: man muss es nur suchen.'⁶¹ The search for biography in Greek inscriptions, though never entirely straightforward, is not completely fruitless. Inscriptions

can be (and were) used as a source of evidence not just of an individual's actions (the fact that Nicias spent time on Delos, for example) but also, and more interestingly, of an individual's moral qualities. These are conveyed in inscriptions not only by the words on the stone (the assertions of *andragathia*, and so on), but also by the simple fact of the stone's existence. It is not necessary to read every word of Heraclides' monument, for example, to get the message that he was (or wanted to be seen as) a good man; the very fact that the Athenians were willing to create this catalogue of his honours indicates this clearly enough.

Some inscriptions do more than this. Towards the end of the fourth century, and increasingly in the third century and beyond, some inscribed texts start to show an interest in recording actions as well as character. One place where this change is visible is in the 'motivation clause' of Athenian honorific decrees. There the change seems to be congruent with a shift in the function of these decrees: these inscriptions (unlike those of the earlier classical period) are being used not so much as a practical record of an active, bilateral reciprocal relationship, but rather as a more general monument to an individual's contribution to the *polis*. But their main function nevertheless remains political: these are lives which are shaped by Athens – both in the historical sense (everything these people do, it seems, they have done for Athens), and in the historiographical (it is the Athenians who retain ultimate control over which aspects of a person's life are recorded, and which omitted or obliterated).

The subordination of the history of individual lives to the contemporary concerns of the *polis* is, then, one recurring feature of the epigraphic evidence, in and beyond Athens. The other dominant theme is a conspicuous lack of interest in providing even that constrained form of biographical monument to the poets, philosophers or other intellectuals of the city. Such men start to regularly appear in the epigraphic record only at a relatively late stage and, when they are visible, are most often acknowledged in terms which firmly place their activities in the context of the city's own achievements or

requirements. This pattern does start to change in the later Hellenistic period as cities (and individuals) start to find more symbolic capital in the exploitation of their cultural past(s), but it is only very rarely, as in the case of the Mnesiepes inscription, that this increased interest in the literary or philosophical heritage of a city translates directly into full-blown biographical epigraphy. For the most part it remains the case that, although lives are being created in these stones (or some of them), these creations are, in turn, just small blocks in the larger building project which is the *polis*' own manufacture of its own account of the city's actions and character.

Notes

- 1 My thanks to Richard Fletcher and Johanna Hanink for the invitation to think and write about this subject, and for their organisation of both the conference and this volume. Thanks also to the University of London Ancient History seminar for listening to (and greatly improving) an earlier version of the paper.
- 2 For the *RGDA* as (auto)biographical text, see André (1993); Ridley (2011); more generally on the representation (and misrepresentation) of Augustus' life and achievements in the text, Ridley (2004) esp. chs 4–7; Cooley (2009) 30–41. On Bisitun see, in general, Kuhrt (2007) 141–57, and for the inscription as historiographic text, Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1999).
- 3 On the lack of biographical information in classical Greek epitaphs, see Lattimore (1962) ch. 7; cf. Momigliano (1993) 43, whose claim that 'fourth-century BC epigrams on tombs contain more biographical details than those of former centuries' is not (in my view) supported by the extant evidence. The few exceptions to the general pattern can usually be explained either by the demands of specific historical circumstances (e.g. *IG* II² 6217: epitaph for Dexileos, including details of birth and death year) or by the extraordinary actions of the person commemorated (e.g. *IG* I³ 1353: memorial for Pythion of Megara, who single-handedly killed seven men). On Roman epitaphs as biographical texts, see Beard (1998); Alföldy (2005).
- 4 On the language (and particularly the formulaic language) of classical Greek honorific decrees, see Henry (1983); Whitehead (1993); (1998); Veligianni-Terzi (1997).
- 5 For wider exploration of the phenomenon, see Biraschi *et al.* (2003); Liddel and Low (2013).

- 6 Plutarch's use of inscriptions is discussed by Liddel (2008), and the following discussion owes much to his analysis.
- 7 Isocrates *Evagoras* 73: τῶν πράξεων καὶ τῆς διανοίας.
- 8 *Nicias* 3.7: πολλὰ καὶ ἀγαθὰ Νικίᾳ παρὰ τῶν θεῶν αἰτουμένους.
- 9 Plu. *TF* 16.3: ἐπιγραφὰς ἔστι τοιαύτας ἄχρι νῦν ὄραν· ὁ δῆμος Τίτω καὶ Ἡρακλεῖ τὸ γυμνάσιον· ἐτέρωθι δὲ πάλιν· ὁ δῆμος Τίτω καὶ Ἀπόλλωνι τὸ Δελφίνιον· ('The inscriptions on the monuments can still be seen: "the *demos* dedicates the gymnasium to Titus and Heracles"; and again in another place: "the *demos* dedicates the Delphinium to Titus and Apollo"').
- 10 *Vita Aeschyli* p. 332 Page (also partially quoted in [Plu] *Mor.* 604E, Athen. 14.627c; described in Paus. 1.14.5).
- 11 Lefkowitz (1981) 71.
- 12 The image of poets serving their city on the battlefield is also a recurring theme, as noted already by Athenaeus (14.627c); compare also the case of Archilochus (see below).
- 13 The case against is summarised by Page (1981) 131–2; the case in favour is made by Sommerstein (2010). Sommerstein is right to note (200) that the epigram is very different (especially in its failure to mention Aeschylus' poetry) from those which are typically inserted in poetic *Lives*; its focus on political rather than cultural contributions is also a characteristic of real inscriptions of the classical period (see below). This could simply be a result of skilled forgery rather than authenticity, however, and the profusion of faked inscriptions in texts of this sort must mean that some doubt remains.
- 14 Fairweather (1974) 254, followed by Lefkowitz (1978) 465. More generally on the Hellenistic phenomenon of the invention of epigrams and epitaphs for earlier poets, see Bing (1988b) 58–65. Some inscribed epitaphs for poets do exist, for early examples see e.g. *CEG* 578 (verse epitaph for Theodorus, possibly the tragic poet; Athens, mid fourth-century); *GVI* 1074 (anonymous first-person epitaph for a 'Μουσῶν θεράπων'; Demetrias, Thessaly, late fourth/early third-century; for further discussion, see Männlein-Robert (2007b)); but they are vastly outnumbered by those found in literary texts. See also Richard Fletcher, [Chapter 10](#), on Diogenes Laertius' verse epitaphs on philosophers.
- 15 The epitaph appears in the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* 337–8 Allen (= Alcidas fr.7.194–5 Avezzù), and in the *Vita Herodotea* (515–16), *Plutarchea* (73–4), *Quarta* (24–5), *Quinta* (51–2), *Sexta* (63 f.), *Suidas* (54–5, 220–1).
- 16 Haake (2004) 475. Philosophers first appear in Athenian honorific contexts in ephebic decrees (the earliest known example is *IG II²* 1006 (122/1)), but the focus in these texts is not on the

- behaviour of the philosophers, but the diligence with which the ephebes have followed their instruction.
- 17 On the historical context (i.e. the political utility for Haliartus in honouring Macedonians at this time), see Fossey (1994) 54–5. The only other extant example of honours for a philosopher in this period is *IG* XII.6 128: honours for Epicrates of Heracleia, Samos, c. 200 BC.
 - 18 A similar pattern is visible in honours voted by Hellenistic cities for visiting poets (see e.g. *I.Iasos* 153, with Rutherford (2007)) and historians (Chaniotis (1988) Part II; Clarke (2008) 338–54).
 - 19 Haake (2004) 476–8.
 - 20 For the exemplification of cardinal virtues as a central concern of ancient character analysis, see Halliwell (1990) esp. 50. For biographies explicitly structured around these virtues, see e.g. Xenophon *Agésilas*. On the listing of virtues in honorific decrees, see Whitehead (1993).
 - 21 On the meaning of the word, see Veligianni-Terzi (1997) 270–2; Whitehead (1998).
 - 22 See *IG* II² 448, Athenian honours for Euphron of Sicyon, for an early, and particularly clear, example of the shift: the stone, set up in 318/17, preserves two decrees: a re-inscription of an earlier decree, passed in 323/2, with the more traditional short motivation clause; and a second decree, of 318/17, with a much longer narrative of Euphron's actions and their beneficial consequences (see further below).
 - 23 The explanation for this change is not the main focus of this discussion, but (briefly) the solution must lie in some combination of political changes and responses to political uncertainty (argued for, in different ways, by Culasso Gastaldi (2003); Luraghi (2010); Lambert (2012); and Shear (2012)); shifts in patterns of literacy and attitudes to written records in the last quarter of the fourth century (for which see, briefly, Thomas (1989) 48–9); and, possibly, changes in legal regulation: *IG* II² 1191, lines 7–10, refers to a *nomos* which requires a proposer of honours to spell out (*prographein*) the ways in which the honorand had benefitted the *polis*. This last text dates to 321/0, but it is not at all clear how old or recent the *nomos* was. A further difficulty lies in pinning down exactly what sort of change needs to be explained: is this a wholesale shift in the practice of formulating decrees in the Assembly (as argued for by Rosen (1987)), or a more specific development in inscribing practice (implied in the observations of Osborne (1999) about the deliberate selectivity of inscribed texts of the earlier classical period)?

- 24 The latter point is emphasised by Kralli (2000). On the ‘highest honours’, see Gauthier (1985) ch. 2 and Kralli (1999); (2000).
- 25 For a brief catalogue of his decrees, see Rhodes (1985) Table F, no. 5.
- 26 Culasso Gastaldi (2003) 90 notes the contrast between this description of Lycurgus’ actions and the ‘*toni passivi e neutri*’ in which the services of Philippides of Cephale (which were also rewarded with the *megistai timai*) are described in *IG II³ 1*, 877. The reference to fear also appears, although in slightly different form, in the version of the decree quoted in the Pseudo-Plutarchan *Lives of the Ten Orators* (852D3–4: here the fear is said to afflict the Athenian *demos*, rather than the Greeks): on the relationship between the inscribed and literary versions of this decree, see Faraguna (2003) 487–91; more generally on this text’s approach to its sources, see Pitcher (2005). It is worth noting that Ps. Plutarch is using ‘documents’ rather than ‘inscriptions’ here: his version of the decree is more likely to derive from an archival archetype (perhaps a draft preserved by the honorand’s family) than from the inscribed monument itself (see below n. 33).
- 27 On the ‘hortatory’ intention of inscribed honorific decrees, see Henry (1996), and more generally on honorific decrees as guides to (or guarantees of) future behaviour, Liddel (2007) 160–82; Domingo Gygax (2009).
- 28 The extant text in this section deals only with the exploits of Phaedrus’ father Thymochares (particularly his military successes, but also diplomatic achievements), but it is clear from lines 3–4 (in which Thymochares is introduced as *ὁ υἱὸς ὁ τοῦτου*, that is, the son of the person previously discussed) that the lost portion of the text contained an account of Phaedrus’ grandfather’s activities (if not earlier generations as well). The presence of a hereditary element in honorific decrees is not entirely novel (for earlier examples, see Walbank (1978) 7, with n. 32), but the inclusion of this level of detail is a new development.
- 29 This section is extant only in the version of the decree quoted by Ps.-Plutarch (852a6–9); the inscribed decree is extremely fragmentary at this point, but the letters which are preserved are not incompatible with the inclusion of this clause in the inscribed monument.
- 30 The underlying causes of this shift towards awarding honours at the end of a political career are disputed: for discussion, see Gauthier (1985) 79–92 (esp. 88); Kralli (1999) 140–8. Such memorials could still, of course, have an important political function for the whole community (as rightly emphasised by Luraghi (2010); Shear (2012)), and for the status of individuals

connected with the honorands; it is worth noting that the inspiration for the inscription of these longer honorific decrees seems often to come from the descendants of the honorand and be driven by a desire to stake a claim to the hereditary privileges granted by the decree: see [Plu] *Vit. X. Or.* 850F (Demochares for Demosthenes); 851D (Laches for Demochares); 851F (Lycophron for Lycurgus).

31 Shear (1978) 46.

32 *Ibid.*

33 Compare Engels (1993) on *hypomnemata* and Hellenistic political biography: a common source is plausible (and would provide an explanation for parallel but non-identical versions of career inscriptions: the decree for Lycurgus in [Plu] *Vit. X. Or.* vs the text preserved *IG II²* 457, for example).

34 For the argument that changes in epigraphic practice should be seen to be driven by the same forces which also lead to the beginning of biographical writing in this period ('ein geistiger Wandel voraus'), see Rosen (1987) 291; similar approach in Errington (2005).

35 Compare the similarly-phrased motivation clauses of the honorific decrees for Callias of Sphettos (*IG II³* 1, 911) and Phaedrus of Sphettos (*IG II³* 1, 985). Henry 1996: 116 (esp. Table 8) records some instances of a hortatory formula which draws attention to the commemoration of the honorand's actions (rather than the *polis*' response), but this seems to be relatively rare, and there is no correlation between the use of this formula and the presence of an extended narrative in the motivation clause (Henry lists only five instances: *Hesperia* 9, pp. 104–5, no. 20; *IG II³* 1, 911; *IG II³* 1, 870; 1374; 1375). On the advertisement of Athenian prestige as the principal function of honorific decrees, see especially Demosthenes *Against Leptines* 20.64: προσήκει τοίνυν τὰς στήλας ταύτας κυρίας ἔαν τὸν πάντα χρόνον, ἴν', ἕως μὲν ἂν τινες ζῶσι, μηδὲν ὑφ' ὑμῶν ἀδικῶνται, ἐπειδὰν δὲ τελευτήσωσιν, ἐκεῖνα τοῦ τῆς πόλεως ἥθους μνημεῖον ὣσι, καὶ παραδείγμαθ' ἑστῶσι τοῖς βουλομένοις τι ποιεῖν ὑμᾶς ἀγαθόν, ὅσους εὖ ποιήσαντας ἡ πόλις ἀντ' εὖ πεποίηκεν ('It is fitting, therefore, to allow these *stelai* to be valid for all time, so that for as long as these men live, they may not be wronged by you, and when they die, these inscriptions will serve as a monument to the character of the city, and stand as proofs to those who wish to do some good to you, showing how many benefactors our city has benefited in return'). The same pattern applies to non-Athenian inscriptions: Haake (2004) 478, n. 43.

36 Suggested by Errington (2005) 19.

- 37 Laqueur (1927) 124–6 (cf. Billheimer (1938) 475–7).
- 38 Emphasised by Baslez (1993).
- 39 On this episode of systematic *damnatio memoriae*, see Byrne (2010) esp. 172–3 for discussion of this inscription and for an informative contrast with the treatment of the motivation clause in the honours for Philippides of Cephale (*IG* II³ 1, 985) and Callias of Sphettos (*IG* II³ 1, 911): these decrees are left untouched, because (Byrne suggests) they contained only unflattering references to the Antigonids.
- 40 Compare Luraghi (2010) 255–60, who sees in these extended motivation clauses a deliberate attempt by the Athenian *demos* to create an ‘authorised’ version of contentious episodes in their own past. His reading perhaps allows too much agency to the *demos* and too little to the honorand in the shaping of the original text of the decrees, but must be a helpful way to approach the impact and afterlife of the monuments.
- 41 *IG* II³ 1, 1034 (c. 250) refers to an inscription, set up in the Temple of Athena Nike, which contained ‘notes on those things done by the king against the barbarians on behalf of the safety of the Greeks’ (ὑπομνήματα τῶν [[τῶι βασιλεῖ]] [i.e. Antigonas Gonatas: for the erasure, see above n. 39] πεπραγμένων πρὸς τοὺς βαρβάρους ὑπὲρ τῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων σωτηρίας (lines 4–6)), but this is usually taken to refer to an account of a more restricted period (the fighting of 278/7) rather than a memoir of all of Antigonas’ *praxeis*.
- 42 The use of σκοπεῖν τῷ βουλευμένῳ as a ‘formula of disclosure’ in Athenian decrees is discussed by Hedrick (1999) 411–13. It is most common in decrees of the earlier classical period, but there is one near-contemporary (deliberately archaising?) parallel in *IG* II² 487 (304/3), lines 8–9.
- 43 ‘The secretary of the people is to set all of his decrees (which are to be valid) on stone *stelai*, and place them on the Acropolis, near to the dedications’ (ἀναθεῖναι δ’ αὐτοῦ – καὶ εἶναι κύρια – πάντα τὰ ψηφίσματα τὸν γραμματέα τοῦ δήμου ἐν στήλαις λιθίναις καὶ στήσαι ἐν ἀκροπόλει πλησίον τῶν ἀναθημάτων): it is not clear whether this is a reference to decrees proposed by Lycurgus or decrees proposed in his honour (the case of the dossier of Heraclides of Salamis, discussed below, perhaps makes the latter slightly more likely). The clause does not appear in the extant parts of the inscribed decree.
- 44 On the historical context of Heraclides’ services and this honour, see Isager and Hansen (1975) 200–8.
- 45 Osborne (1999) 353. For propaganda/image-management as a motivation for the creation of other sorts of epigraphic dossiers, see Davies (2003) 333–5.

- 46 Mnesiepes: Kontoleon (1952); Sosthenes: *IG* XII.5 445 + *Suppl.* pp. 212–14. For the most recent editions of both inscriptions and relevant earlier bibliography, see Clay (2004) Catalogue II.2–3. (Clay’s text and numbering is used in what follows.) Sosthenes seems to have been a member of a prominent Parian family (*IG* XII.5 1030, with Gossage 1951). Less is known of Mnesiepes, but it is possible that he was a member of the same family (the name appears twice in that family in the first century BC; the connection is suggested by Tarditi (1956) 122, n. 3; Chaniotis (1988) 30, n. 49); it has also been inferred from his name that he was a professional rhapsode (Lefkowitz (1981) 27, following Nagy (1979) 304, n. 3).
- 47 The Mnesiepes inscription was discovered 3 km NE of Parikia and refers to the *Archilocheion* in Col. II, line 17; two fragments of the Sosthenes inscription were found, in a secondary context, in the church of Panagia Ekatonpiliani in Parikia town (*IG* XII.5 445; Peek (1985) 13); the third in the Venetian Kastro in the same town (*IG* XII.5 p. 315). For a summary of the (scant) archaeological evidence, and some tentative suggestions on the location of the *Archilocheion*, see Clay (2004) 35–8 (and cf. Ohnesorg (1982)).
- 48 Tarditi (1956) 128 suggests that Demeas’ text might also have been inscribed. This is possible, but cannot be proved (the use of the term ‘write up’ [ἀναγράφειν] to describe Demeas’ activity need not imply that he ‘wrote up’ his history on stone, as Chaniotis (1988) 34 points out).
- 49 Some caution is obviously called for here given the fragmentary nature of the text, but the following *vacat* at least guarantees that the word came at the end of a section. For the *Paros*-centric nature of Sosthenes’ inscription, see Clay (2004) 33.
- 50 On Sosthenes’ own claim for civic honours in this text see Clay (2004) 34.
- 51 AI, lines 42–3: ‘the poet himself states these things plainly’ ([δῖ]ασφαεῖ δὲ τ[αῦτα | καὶ] αὐτὸς ὁ [ποιητῆς . . .]); A.IV lines 1, 8: ‘the poet shows’ (δηλοῖ ὁ ποιητῆς) (the same phrase is restored at A.IV.21).
- 52 On the presence and role of the Delphic Oracle in this inscription, see Parke (1958).
- 53 Suggested to me by Liz Irwin. The late-second/early-first century ‘Salmakis’ inscription from Halicarnassus (*SEG* 48.1330, lines 43–56; for more recent bibliography, see Gagné (2006) n.1) provides a good parallel for an appeal to a city’s literary heritage as a source of pride.
- 54 See e.g. Tarditi (1956); Lefkowitz (1981) 25–9/(2012) 33–5; Clay (2004) 14–24. Rotstein (2014) 7 observes that the layout of the

inscription ('designed to visually represent a papyrus leaf') is intended to reinforce the text's self-presentation as a (generically) literary, rather than epigraphic, text.

- 55 Chaniotis (1988) 14–19 sees a possible parallel in the (early fourth-century) monument for Theogenes of Thasos, which is reconstructed by Pouilloux (1954) no. 9 as including a biographical narrative of the hero's life; the text is extremely fragmentary, however, and Fraser's ((1957) 99–100) scepticism about the plausibility of Pouilloux's theory seems justified. Compare also Paus. 7.5.13 + McCabe *Chios* 499, interpreted by Chaniotis (1988) 40–1 as evidence that the *heroon* of Oinopion on Chios contained an inscription which documented the myth/history of the hero and his cult. The (auto)biographical elements in other sorts of religious inscription are briefly discussed by Baslez (1993). More generally on the intersections between local history, religious history and *polis* pride (particularly in the Hellenistic period), see Dillery (2005).
- 56 *FGH* 239, securely dated to 264/3.
- 57 Kontoleon (1952) 52; see also Clarke (2008) 300. Peek (1954) 46 goes one step further and suggests that the two texts shared a single creator in Mnesiepes; the objections to his theory are set out by Chaniotis (1988) 89, while Rotstein (2014) emphasises the visual differences between the two monuments. On the findspot of the Mnesiepes inscription, see above n. 477. Fragment B of the *Marmor Parium* was discovered in the SE part of Parikia town (Krispi and Wilhelm (1897) 183–4); the findspot of Fragment A is unknown (it was purchased in Smyrna in 1627: Jacoby (1904) vi).
- 58 The exact sources used by the *Marmor Parium* are hard to pin down, but a brief summary of the probable candidates is provided by Jacoby (1904) xi–xviii.
- 59 Clarke (2008) 331–5 (who notes that the breaking down of the boundaries between poetry and historiography seems to be a more widespread phenomenon in this period).
- 60 For example: Orpheus (*FGH* 239.14), Homer (29), Terpander's musical innovations (34), Aeschylus' first tragic victory (50). My thanks to Johanna Hanink for drawing this peculiarity to my attention.
- 61 Errington (2005) 13.

PART IV

LAUGHING MATTERS AND *LIVES*
OF THE MIND

CHAPTER 8

ON BEES, POETS AND PLATO: ANCIENT BIOGRAPHERS' REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS

MARY LEFKOWITZ

Introduction

If there is any consistent feature of European literary history, it is a tendency to try to connect authors closely to their works.¹ Biographers have found it both logical and natural to connect the creative process closely with particular events in an individual life, but quite often tend to overlook other possible sources of influence. It is as if we who are not creative writers cannot imagine that a work of literature, whether prose or poetry, is the product of discipline, deep thinking, extensive knowledge and hard work. The writers themselves share much of the blame for the deficiencies in their biographers' understanding. Ancient Greek authors usually did not explain in any detail how or why they decided to compose their works. Nor did they discuss how they went about writing them, at least so far as we know from the information that has come down to us. Before Roman times it seems that no ancient Greek wrote anything like what we would now call an autobiography.² At least part of the reason was that in literature, as in plastic art, there was a tendency to describe individual experience in generic terms, as if myth were truer than history because it deals with universals, and history with particulars. In order for history to acquire a dimension that was both philosophical and serious, it needed to include some reference, even if indirect, to the truth (*alētheia*) conveyed in myth. As Aristotle said, poetry (*poiēsis*) is a more philosophical and serious matter than historical inquiry (*historia*; *Poet.* 1451b).³ It may also be the case, as Wilamowitz suggested, that the Greeks' reluctance to describe a person as a whole was somehow connected with their practice of not taking

into account the impersonal forces that bring about historical actions.⁴ No wonder, then, that their biographers needed to turn to such information as they did have, the works of individual authors, and what other writers, such as Aristophanes, might have said about them.

Creating literary biography with such limited resources required both close reading and an active imagination. Because of the restricted nature of the evidence at their disposal, biographers were confronted with many challenges, not the least of which was providing their audiences with plausible explanations of how authors came to write what they did, and how they became authors in the first place. In the absence of autobiographical data, biographers could extract information from first-person statements in an author's works. This method, however, had serious limitations. Sometimes it was not immediately clear whether the author was speaking in his or her 'own' voice or putting words into the mouth of a character in a narrative. Often authors spoke about themselves only in terms of their professional status, and not about their historical or personal selves, as many writers now seem only too eager to do. The result was that in most cases ancient biographers were compelled to use analogy or conjecture based on what was probable or likely (*eikos*) to provide stories that might help to provide explanations for obscure or generic first-person statements.

In this chapter I shall try to explain how biographers transformed the limited raw material the poets offered them into narrative accounts of the creative process. I shall begin with a survey of the various tropes that biographers used to describe poetic inspiration, and then explain why Plato's biographers used some of the same tropes in their accounts of Plato's infancy. In particular I should like to try to show why biographers said that bees laid honey on the lips or built honeycombs in the mouths not only of several poets, but also of Plato, whose medium was prose, and who argued that poetry should have no place in his ideal *polis*. In conclusion, I shall suggest that Plato's ancient biographers spoke about bees laying honey on his lips in order to represent the poetic qualities of his writing, but that bees also signify the power to cause

pain. The image of bees and honey in the mouth is a more potent device (and less ludicrous) than it might seem, and ultimately more effective than some modern attempts to describe the gifts that made Plato's philosophy so persuasive and influential.

Describing inspiration

From a modern point of view it is particularly striking that ancient Greek biographers did not try to explain literary talent or the achievement that results from that talent as the product of a cerebral or internal process.⁵ To them, the cause of creativity was always external. Here they were following the practice of the poets who gave the Muses credit for their ability to compose song. Homer asks the Muses to tell him who were the leaders of the Greek army. He says that the Muses can know because they are present (*parestē*) and have seen and are seeing (*iste*) everything. Poets only hear what is reported to them (*kleos*) and do not *know* (*idmen*) anything: 'We could not narrate or name the multitude', 'unless the Muses of Olympus, the daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus, could recall how many came to Ilion' (*Il.* 2.491–2). The Muses possess extraordinary knowledge because their mother is Memory (*Mnemosynē*; Hes. *Theog.* 53).⁶ Like Homer, Hesiod portrays himself as a passive recipient of special gifts that come to him from the gods. The knowledge given to him by the Muses helps to establish his authority as a poet; they gave Hesiod a branch of laurel to use as a staff, so that he might be identified a seer (since laurel is sacred to Apollo).⁷ They 'breathed (*enepneusan*) song into me', the 'I' of the poem claims, 'so that I might sing what will be and what was' (30–2). And that is all that he tells us in his first-person statements about how he came to compose the poem known to us as the *Theogony*. We do not hear from him why the Muses chose him rather than one of the other shepherds, or how he learned how to arrange his words in an established metrical pattern, or to sing and accompany himself on a lyre. He does not tell us whether he composed with the aid of writing; the gift of knowledge would be required for either

oral or written composition, since there were no reference books to consult. The poets who wrote songs of praise (*enkōmia*) for victors in the games and for other achievements also invoke the Muses, and call on them when they introduce a new topic in their song.⁸ Pindar describes himself as being directed by the Muses; he is their helper. Like Homer, Pindar speaks of the Muses as the source of the poet's knowledge.⁹

When poets were less explicit about their sources of inspiration than Hesiod was in the *Theogony* (22–34), biographers constructed narratives that provided plausible explanations. Pindar says that he 'will pray to the Mother whom in the night with Pan the Maidens often celebrate in song beside my door' (*Pyth.* 3.77–9). A scholar in second-century BC Alexandria, Aristodemus of Thebes (*FGrHist* 383F*13), explained that Pindar had seen a vision of a stone statue of the Mother of the gods, and had set up a shrine honouring both the Mother and Pan (schol. *Pyth.* 3.137b).¹⁰ In an anecdote preserved in Pindar's *vita*, we are told that the poet wrote his hymn to Pan (fr. 95) because Pan had been heard singing one of Pindar's paean between Mount Helicon and Mount Cithaeron (*Vit. Amb.* p. 2.2–6 Dr).¹¹ Pindar wrote a hymn (fr. 37) to Demeter because the goddess appeared to him in a dream and criticised him for never having written a song for her (*Vit. Amb.* p. 2.6–10 Dr).¹²

Jokes in comedies provided another source of stories about poetic inspiration. Again, the stimulus was always described as external. According to the fourth-century biographer Chamaeleon, Aeschylus' portrayal of drunkards in his satyr play *Cabiri* showed that 'what the tragedian did himself he has fastened on to his heroes – he wrote his tragedies while he was drunk'. Chamaeleon quotes Sophocles as saying 'Aeschylus, you write what you ought to write but without knowing it' (fr. 40ab Wehrli = *TrGF* 3, T 117 = *TrGF* 4, T 52a); presumably this quotation in its original form came from a comedy that had poets among its characters, like Aristophanes' *Frogs*. Such jokes may have inspired an anecdote about Aeschylus that was told to the second-century AD traveller Pausanias when he was visiting the theatre of Dionysus in Athens: Aeschylus

himself was said to have said that when he was a boy keeping watch over the grapes in a vineyard, he fell asleep and the god appeared to him, and as soon as he woke up he found that he could write verses (Paus. 1.21.2–3 = *TrGF* 3, T 111). But in comedy the source of inspiration did not necessarily need to be divine. One of Euripides' biographers says that he 'drew most of his comparisons from the sea' because he worked in a seaside cave on the island of Salamis (*Eur. Vit.*, *TrGF* 5.1, T 2, III.1); the same biographer also states that he wrote the *Hippolytus*, a drama that depicts a wife's desire to commit adultery, because his own wife was unfaithful to him (*Eur. Vit.*, *TrGF* 5.1, T1, III.2).¹³ The idea of physically induced inspiration was said to have been taken to its logical extreme by Dionysius I, tyrant of Syracuse, who acquired Aeschylus' writing tablet in the hope of improving his own verse (Lucian, *Adv. Ind.* 15 = *TrGF* 3, T 153), and who also paid Euripides' heirs one talent for the poet's harp, tablet and stylus (*TrGF* 5.1, T 1 III.3).¹⁴

Biographers were not restricted to autobiographical information in the poets' own works or in what comic poets might have said about them. They could also rely on familiar mythological patterns. A biographer, summarizing the third book of Aristotle's (now lost) treatise *On Poets* (fr. 76 Rose), said that Homer's father was a divinity (*daimōn*) who danced along with the Muses.¹⁵ He does not name the divinity who was Homer's father, but in earlier sources the god who most often accompanies the Muses is Apollo (e.g. [Hes.], *Scut.* 201–6, Pind., *Pyth.* 1.1–2). In other biographical narratives divine intervention manifests itself as a prophecy or portent that occurs in the poet's infancy or youth and has an instantaneous transformative effect on the poet, like the Muses' gift of the laurel branch to Hesiod. Mnesiepes also relates how Archilochus' father went to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi to inquire about his son's encounter with the nine women, and the god told him that the first of his sons to meet him would be 'immortal and the subject of song'; that son proved to be Archilochus (Cat. E, II, 2.50–5 Clay).¹⁶ According to Euripides' *Vita* the poet's father received an oracle that his son 'would win at contests in which crowns were awarded' and so had him

trained to compete in the *pankration*, though Euripides later understood the oracle's true meaning, and became a poet (Euripides *TrGF* 5.1, T 1 IA.2).

Bees in poets' mouths

One of the more frequent forms taken by such portents of poetic talent involved bees, which were associated with the Muses and Apollo. The connection between honey and eloquence goes back to Homer; Nestor's speech poured from his mouth more sweetly than honey (*Il.* 1.249).¹⁷ The similarity between the words honey (*meli*) and song (*melos*) made the association with poets and poets seem natural; the analogy casts either the song or the poet in the role of a conveyance. Either the song is a bee going from flower to flower (Pind., *Pyth.* 10.54), or the poet is a bee gathering honey (Simonides, PMG 593). Bacchylides calls himself 'the bee (*melissa*) from the island [Ceos]' (Ode 10.10).¹⁸ Bees were believed to be both the producers and consumers of honey.¹⁹ Aristophanes says that the comic poet Phrynichus 'like a bee feeds on the flowers of immortal songs' (*meleōn*, *Av.* 748–51) and that Sophocles' mouth was anointed with honey (*TrGF* 4, T108 = fr. 598 K-A, *PCG* III.2, p. 319).²⁰ The idea of the bee-poet was so familiar that third-century BC poet Hermesianax could refer to Sophocles simply as the 'Attic bee', though makes sure his audience knows specifically which poet he is talking about by mentioning Colonus (Sophocles' deme) by the end of the same line (*CA* 7.57–60 = *TrGF* 4, T 78).²¹ The compiler of Sophocles' *Vita* says that Sophocles was called 'the bee' because he took the best from his predecessors (*TrGF* 4, T.1.20).²² But that seems to have been a guess, because according to scholia to Ar. *Vesp.* 462 and to Soph. *OC* 17 Sophocles was called a bee because of his eloquence. The metaphor had become standard by Plato's day. As he has Socrates say in the *Ion*, 'the poets tell us that they pluck their songs (*melē*) from springs that flow with honey (*melirrhytōn*) from the gardens and vales of the Muses, and like bees

(*melittai*) they bring them to us' (534a–b).²³ In this analogy the bees collect rather than create or ingest the material for their song, so that the source of inspiration for song comes from outside the poets.

Although in archaic poetry the connection between honey and song was expressed in metaphorical form, some biographers preferred to describe the association between honey and song as a physical occurrence and a portent. Instead of comparing a song to honey, they spoke about bees depositing honey on a poet's lips, or even building a honeycomb in his mouth. Chamaeleon (fr. 32a Wehrli) and the third-century historian Ister (*FGrHist* 334 F 77) both told a version of this story about Pindar, who (like Hesiod) discovered his calling on Mount Helicon (*Vit. Amb.* 2, p. 1.7–9 Dr).²⁴

When Pindar was a boy ... he went hunting near Mount Helicon and fell asleep from exhaustion. As he slept a bee landed on his mouth and built a honeycomb there. Others say that he had a dream in which his mouth was full of honey and wax, and that he then decided to write poetry.

In the version of the story preserved by Aelian (165/70–230/5 AD), the portent saved the poet's life. The baby Pindar had been exposed, or left out to die, but then bees fed him with honey and marked him as a child with special promise (*VH* 12.45). Such incidents were regarded as miraculous and hence a manifestation of the divine, as in the story of the bees who fed the shepherd-singer Comatas after he was placed alive in a chest (Theoc., *Id.* 7.81).²⁵ An anonymous epigram, probably dating to Roman times, describes how bees plucked the Muses' flowers and built a home in Menander's mouth (1238–9 *FGE* = *AP* 9.187).²⁶ The portent of bees in the mouth was included in the biographies of Hesiod and Lucan (*Vit. Vaccae*, p. 335 Hosius) and told also of the boy Virgil (*Vit. Focae* 28–30). Apparently by late Hellenistic times the metaphor became a standard portent of poetic talent. On the bronze statue of Homer in the gymnasium in Byzantium erected during the reign of Septimius Severus (145–211 AD), a bee was shown placing a honeycomb on the poet's mouth (*AP* 2.342–3).

Inspiring Plato

It is not surprising that divine intervention and dramatic events figure prominently in biographies of poets whose subject matter was drawn from mythology, and whose vocabulary was at least to some extent inspired by the language of epic. But the same sorts of events turn up also in narratives about authors whose work was not directly concerned with traditional religion, most notably in the biography of Plato, who specifically sought to discourage the use of mythological poetry in the ideal state that he describes in the *Republic*. That a similar format was used for figures so diverse as Pindar and Plato implies that biography in one respect at least had a function similar to that of mythology, which was to incorporate individuals into the generic, especially when the generic model conferred on the individual some kind of extraordinary status and connection with divinity.²⁷ We can see evidence of such a biographical template in the account of Plato's life in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives and Sayings of the Eminent Philosophers*, which Richard Fletcher also discusses in this volume. Diogenes wrote his collection of biographies in the third century AD for a patroness who in his words was a 'Platonist (*philoplatōn*), who eagerly seeks out the philosopher's ideas (*dogmata*) in preference to those of others' (3.47).²⁸ He does not mention her name; nor does he tell us if she read the dialogues as Plato wrote them, or in a summary version, such as Apuleius' *De Dogmate Platonis*. First Diogenes offers this aristocratic lady information about Plato's life and personality, and then he provides a brief discussion of Plato's methodology, a concise history of the dialogue form, an overview of the contents of his writings, and a summary of the doctrines 'he approved of', based on *Timaeus*.²⁹

In the opening section of his biography Diogenes emphasizes Plato's connection with divinity.³⁰ He first describes Plato's ancestors, and observes that both his father's and mother's families claimed to be descended from Poseidon (3.1). Next he relates a story that suggests that the god Apollo might have been Plato's father:

On bees, poets and Plato

Speusippus in his *Funeral Feast of Plato* (fr. 1a–b Tarán), Clearchus in his *Encomium on Plato* (Wehrli, fr. 2a–b) and Anaxilides in Book 2 of his *On Philosophers* said that there was a story (*logos*) in Athens that since [Plato's mother] Perictione was attractive (*horaia*)³¹ [her husband] Ariston tried to force her to have intercourse with him but did not succeed. When he stopped forcing her he saw an epiphany of Apollo. After that he refrained from having intercourse with her until she gave birth. (Diogenes Laertius 3.2)

The idea that Perictione needed to abstain from intercourse has a mythological analogy in the story of Coronis, the mother of Apollo's son Asclepius. Although Coronis had been abducted by Apollo and was carrying 'the pure seed of the god', she had intercourse with a mortal. Apollo asked Artemis to kill her, and took his unborn child from her body (Pind., *Pyth.* 3.11–46).³² Plato's eulogist Speusippus would have known the family history, because he was Plato's nephew (the son of Plato's sister) and his successor as head of the Academy (D.L. 4.1).³³ Hinting at the possibility of divine parentage is a high compliment; the oracle at Delphi told Philip of Macedon to honor the god Ammon, who in the form of a snake was Alexander's true father (Plu., *Alex.* 3.1–2). The notion that Plato was said to have been the son of Apollo could have been mentioned after his death (even if only to dismiss it) in a eulogy or an encomium. Mentioning and disregarding is a form of *praeteritio*, a rhetorical technique that calls attention to the sincerity of the speaker's motives.

In his biography of Plato, Diogenes notes that the second-century BC historian Apollodorus also indicated in his treatise on *Chronology* that there was a connection between Apollo and Plato: the philosopher was born on the seventh day of Thargelion, the date that was celebrated in Delos as the god's birthday (D.L. 3.3 = *FGrHist* 244 F 37).³⁴ Apollodorus said that Socrates had been born on the previous day, the birthday of Apollo's sister Artemis (D.L. 2.44 = *FGrHist* 244 F34). Plato himself was the source of the idea that Socrates had a special connection to Apollo: the Delphic oracle had said that no one was wiser than he (*Apol.* 21b). In the *Apology* Plato

represents Socrates as insisting that he was following Apollo's orders (*kata ton theon*, 23b) when he tried to show that the oracle was wrong (21b–c). Socrates describes himself as 'helping the god' (*boēthōn*, 23b), and speaks of his work as 'service to the god' (*latreia*, 23b) and 'cooperation with the god' (*hypēresia*, 30a).³⁵ In the *Phaedo* we hear that while in prison Socrates dedicated to Apollo the poem of his versification of Aesop (60e), and later in the dialogue he compares himself to Apollo's bird, the swan, who was thought to sing most beautifully when he was about to die (85b).³⁶ This passage served as the inspiration for an anecdote about Socrates and Plato. According to Diogenes, Socrates dreamt that he had a cygnet on his knees, which immediately put on feathers and flew off crying out a sweet sound; Plato came to him the next day and Socrates realized that Plato was the swan in his dream (3.5).³⁷ Whoever first told this story understood that it was through Plato rather than Socrates himself that Socrates' ideas became widely known. The phrase 'on his knees' portrays the intellectual connection between the two philosophers as a physical relationship, with Socrates in the role of Plato's father.³⁸

Portents involving bees provided yet another mode of indicating a connection between Apollo and Plato. In a story preserved by Cicero, bees sat on the lips of the baby Plato, and this was a sign of his future eloquence (*de Div.* 1.78).³⁹ Neoplatonists preferred a more explicit version in which bees laid Hymettus honey on the baby Plato's lips while his parents were offering a sacrifice to the Nymphs or Apollo Nomios (Olympiodorus, *In Alc.* 2.24–9 and *Anon. Proleg.* 2.16–22).⁴⁰ Honey, as we have seen, was an established metaphor for eloquence, but it was also specifically associated with Apollo's cult at Delphi, and the bees that made it possessed and conveyed some of that god's prophetic powers.⁴¹

Apollo's second temple at Delphi was said to have been created by bees out of wax and feathers (Paus. 10.5.9). Pindar calls the priestess of Apollo 'the Delphic bee' when she speaks her prophecy (*Pyth.* 4.60).⁴² The author of the *Homeric Hymn*

to *Hermes* mentions the three winged bee-maiden goddesses on Mount Parnassus who utter true prophecies, but only after they have eaten honey (*Hym. Hom. Merc.* 560–6).⁴³ Apollo's son Iamos, who became a seer, was fed as an infant on the 'blameless venom of bees' (Pind., *Ol.* 6.46–7).⁴⁴

Diogenes also tells a story that shows how Plato was inspired by, in addition to Apollo, his teacher Socrates (3.4–6). Like the young Euripides who trained for the *pankration* (*TrGF* 5.1, T 1, IA.2), the young Plato had been a wrestler who competed in the Isthmian games; he also worked at becoming a painter, and wrote poetry, first dithyrambs, then lyrics and finally tragedies. He admired the philosopher Heraclitus, but it was only when he first heard Socrates speaking in the theatre of Dionysus that he burned his poetry and became Socrates' pupil. The source of this story appears to have been the fourth-century biographer Dicaearchus of Messene (fr. 40 Wehrli). But the narrative may have been inspired by Book 10 of the *Republic*, where Plato recommended omitting traditional poetry from the guardians' educational program because of its appeal to the emotions, and because it discourages reasoning and analysis.⁴⁵ Plato's decision to become a philosopher is explained in a less dramatic way in the Platonic *Seventh Letter*.⁴⁶ The author of that epistle simply represents Plato as following the model of Socrates. He has Plato say (325d–326b) that he had intended to become active in politics, but decided not to do so once he saw that men and laws could not easily or quickly be reformed or made better; the constitutions of all states were bad, and there would be no improvement until they could be governed by philosophers. The author of the *Seventh Letter* took this idea first of all from Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, where Socrates explains that his *daimonion* prevented him from participating in politics (31c–e): 'it is essential for the person who truly campaigns on behalf of justice, if he wishes to survive for even a short time, to remain a private citizen and not be involved in public life' (32a). The notion that no current system of government is adequate comes from the *Republic*, where Socrates seeks to describe the ideal state.

Some modern accounts of Plato's inspiration

Like the author of the *Seventh Letter*, modern scholars have based their accounts of Plato's intellectual development on information drawn from Plato's own works, and elsewhere in this volume Constanze Güthenke discusses the significance of Plato's own biographical tradition for the work and self-fashioning of classical philologists around the turn of the twentieth century. In his 1918 reconstruction of Plato's biography, Wilamowitz (1848–1931) essentially ignores the biographical material in the *Seventh Letter* and in Diogenes Laertius. Instead he reconstructs the intellectual world in which the characters in Plato's dialogues were active, and Plato himself was growing up. He turns to Plato's own words for evidence of Socrates' influence on him.⁴⁷ As Wilamowitz portrays it, Plato was not turned into a philosopher because he suddenly realised that he needed to abandon and burn his poetry and follow Socrates; his intellectual development was the product of thought and education, which occurred gradually over a long period of time. Wilamowitz certainly helps us to understand how it was possible for Plato to write what he did, but not why it was only Plato, rather than one of Socrates' other pupils, who managed to write Plato's dialogues.

Like Wilamowitz, Paul Friedländer (1882–1968) disregarded the writings of ancient biographers in his multi-volume study of Plato's work. But instead of supposing that he could understand the development of Plato's thought by describing the intellectual world in which he grew up, as Wilamowitz had done, Friedländer turned to Plato's allegory of the cave at the beginning of Book 7 of the *Republic* (514a–517).⁴⁸ Although in context it is Socrates who is speaking, Friedländer understood the passage as an autobiographical account of Plato's intellectual development:

Durch wen er den Weg gefunden hat, spricht er aus, indem er seinen Dialogen einzig den Sokrates zum Führer bestellt nach diesem Ziele hin. Auch der Mensch im Höhlengleichnis des *Staates*, dem die Lösung aus den Fesseln und der Aufstieg gelang, trägt Züge des Sokrates. Denn wenn jener wieder zu den Gefesselten tritt und sie 'lösen und hinaufführen' will, so 'würden sie

ihn töten, vermöchten sie ihn nur in die Hände zu bekommen'. Platon konnte nicht deutlicher sagen, wer ihn selbst umgewendet und hinaufgeführt hat dorthin, wo er zuerst der wirklichen Dinge wirkliche Schatten, dann ihre Spiegelbilder, dann sie 'selbst' und die 'Sonne' zu sehen lernte.⁴⁹

According to Friedländer, the man who returns to the cave to free others is Socrates, and Plato was one of the inmates of the cave who was rescued by the Socrates-figure. In his paraphrase Friedländer employs the kind of terminology one might use to describe a religious conversion (den Weg, Führer, Ziele, umgewendet). In regarding the allegory of the cave as autobiographical, he may have been influenced by the same German philosophical tradition that had led Georg Misch in his *History of Autobiography in Antiquity* to characterise as a spiritual 'conversion' Socrates' quest for a man wiser than himself.⁵⁰ Misch refers to the *Republic* passage as one of several examples of Plato's 'vision' of the 'philosophic mood', and the 'directing energy of the progress of the soul, while Plato develops the way that leads to the vision of God in the emotional attitude of man'.⁵¹

Although the terminology of conversion is emotionally compelling, was Friedländer justified in assuming that the allegory of the cave had specifically autobiographical elements? Plato himself does not suggest that the passage describes his own or Socrates' personal experience. Rather, he states that his description of the cave is only a 'likeness' (*eikōn*). He explicitly does not give names either to the man who returns to the cave nor to the victims that he rescues. In the dialogue Socrates is talking about the education of the guardians, and says that the people watching the images in the cave are like *all* of us (*homoious hēmin*, 515a), not just himself or Plato in particular. In his description of the release of the prisoners Plato concentrates on their emotions and physical reactions rather than on their intellectual or spiritual development. The process of becoming educated, as Plato imagines it, is by no means instantaneous, but a gradual transformation requiring years of study. The goal is not personal enlightenment, as it might be in a modern religious experience, but the acquisition of knowledge of the good that in turn allows the person who

has been released from the cave to act wisely in private and public life (517c).

Friedländer certainly knew that his autobiographical interpretation of Plato's image of the cave could offer only an incomplete account of Plato's intellectual development. Influence and environment certainly have an impact on the creative process, and can be described, as Wilamowitz did with incomparable breadth and precision. But no biographer, ancient or modern, has been able to explain in any detail how anyone's mind works, or what specific intellectual powers or life experiences made it possible for someone to become a Homer, Euripides or Plato. Pindar claimed that real talent was inherent in an individual's nature (*phya*) and could not be taught (*Ol.* 2. 86–7; *Nem.* 3. 40–2). It also seems to be the case that it cannot comprehensively be described or analysed, even by modern biographers. The creative process is still being described as if it were something coming from outside, be it influence or tradition, and it is still being represented metaphorically, as a flash of illumination, like a light bulb in a cartoon balloon.

Why then did Plato's biographers suppose that bees built a honeycomb in the baby Plato's mouth? In Pindar's case the portent was understood to be a predictor of poetic genius. Plato too set out to be a poet, composing 'dithyrambs, then lyrics, and tragedies' (D.L.3.5). He was about to enter the competition in which dramas were chosen for performance, but when he heard Socrates he burned his poetry (D.L.3.5). In choosing to use the story of the honeycomb, Plato's biographers understood something about the nature of Plato's writing that the great philosopher himself never explicitly discusses, but of which ancient literary critics were well aware. Plato persuades and teaches not only by rigorous analysis and dialectic, but also by the use of metaphor, such as the analogy in the *Ion* of a magnetic chain extending from the Muse through the poet to the rhapsode (533d–e), or the image (*eikōn*) in the *Republic* of the prisoner being dragged from the cave into the light of day.⁵² He also builds some of his narratives on mythological patterns, and uses some of techniques of persuasion

employed by orators. He may not have invented the notion of a dialogue, but as Diogenes Laertius observed for the benefit of his female patron, 'he perfected its form and thus could justifiably win first prize for its beauty and its invention' (3.48).⁵³ Ancient critics discussed Plato's literary style and compared it to that of the famous orators; for example, 'Longinus' praised his style and thought that he had set out to emulate Homer (Longin. 13.1, 4); Dionysius of Halicarnassus observed that in the *Phaedrus* his style could be 'noises and dithyrambs, a great outpouring of words that have little meaning' (*Dem.* 7. 3–4), making Plato sound like the poets that he had criticised in the *Ion* for their incomprehension!⁵⁴

Conclusion: the significance of the honeycomb

The story that bees put honey on the lips of the baby Plato thus shows that biographers recognised that (as 'Longinus' puts it) 'Plato's writing flowed in a soundless stream' (*Subl.* 13.1).⁵⁵ But why include bees and wax along with the honey, as in Aelian's versions of the story (*Var. Hist.* 12.21, 45)? Having a mouth filled with a honeycomb would be awkward and uncomfortable for the recipient, as a phrase from one of Aristophanes' lost comedies may imply: 'a honeycomb sat down on [Sophocles]', (*TrGF* 4, T 1.22 = fr. 679 K-A, PCG III.2, p. 349). The honeycomb is sustaining to the poet, but at the same time might prove dangerous to himself and to others because of the presence of the bees.⁵⁶ Commenting on a picture of Sophocles, Philostratus the Younger describes the bees flying around the poet's mouth, and then supposes that 'perhaps a little later someone will call you [Sophocles] the wasp nest (*anthrēnion*) of the kindly Muses, and cry out that everybody should be afraid of being near you, in case a bee flies out from your mouth and stings them without notice' (*Imag.* 13.3).⁵⁷ The scene that Philostratus describes sounds like a comic parody of the poetic notion that poets are like bees (fr. *480 PCG VIII, p. 143).⁵⁸ But even if Philostratus' description was based on a joke in a play rather than an actual painting, it reminds us that bees can cause pain as well as

pleasure. Poets understood that their art had both positive and negative powers. They recognised that there was similarity between archers and poets, bows and lyres. Odysseus tells the story of his journey at a banquet in *Odyssey* 9–12; at another banquet, as he prepares to kill the suitors, he strings his bow as a singer would string a lyre (*Od.* 21.406–8).⁵⁹ Pindar in particular describes himself as an archer, and his words as arrows, always conscious of the benefits that his poetry could bring or the potential damage that it could do, whether to his patrons or to himself. Whoever came up with the idea of the honeycomb in Pindar's mouth may have been familiar with that poet's metaphors, and to have used the honeycomb as a graphic and dramatic means of expressing to their audiences both the appeal and the danger of the poet's language and ideas. Did Plato's first biographers perceive that the same trope could also work for that very different writer, who beguiled his audiences with beautiful narratives, but at the same time forced them uncomfortably to realise how much they themselves resembled the deluded inhabitants in the allegory of the cave?

In the condensed forms that they have come down to us, the anecdotes about bees building honeycombs in the mouths of infants can seem crude and incredible, like the story about Socrates' dream of the cygnet on his knees that quickly grew into a singing swan. Yet even in its present form the cygnet story manages with great economy to convey a central truth about Socrates and Plato, expressing in metaphorical terms the nature of their relationship, and the important role Plato played in informing others about Socrates' ideas. Perhaps also in the original sources (as opposed to the summary versions related by later writers) stories about bees building honeycombs in the mouths of authors would have indicated explicitly that words bring both pleasure and pain, and stories about singing swans would have helped to explain why biographers tend to pay special attention to the final words of the famous poets and philosophers. But even in their present forms it is possible to see that these anecdotes can still convey essential truths about a writer's work or legacy, especially to

audiences who could not or did not have time to read or study the works in their entirety.

Notes

- 1 See Jefferson (2007) 17; Kris and Kurz (1979) 131–2.
- 2 Misch (1950) I 287 begins his survey of ‘Writers’ Autobiographies and Character Analysis’ with the second half of the first century BC.
- 3 See especially Leo (1913) I 341–2, and in general Lefkowitz (2009a) 355–7.
- 4 In his review of Misch’s 1907 edition of *Geschichte der Autobiographie* Wilamowitz (1972 [1907]) 124 observed: ‘Wir dürfen nicht verschleiern, dass die Hellenen, ebensowenig wie sie eine wirkliche Geschichtsforschung erzeugt haben, einen Menschen ganz wirklich aufzufassen nicht verstanden haben’. ‘We must not overlook the fact that just as the Hellenes produced no real historical works, they were unable to conceive an individual man in the full reality of his existence’ (tr. Dickes; Misch (1950) x). See also Constanze Güthenke, Chapter 2.
- 5 See especially Murray (2006) 39–41; Storr (1988) 24–5, 198–200.
- 6 Cf. also how after the Phaeacian bard Demodocus has finished telling the story of Ares and Aphrodite, Odysseus compliments him on his song: ‘Demodocus, I praise you beyond all men, either the Muse has taught you, or indeed Apollo’ (*Od.* 8.487–8); Murray (2008) 43–5.
- 7 See especially Minchin (2001) 163–4; Koning (2010) 323–4; on the bearer of a laurel staff as the god’s representative, see West (1966) 163–4. On the motif of mantic initiation in biography and myth, see also Kivilo (2010) 208–9.
- 8 E.g. Pind. *Ol.* 1.3; *Nem.* 3.1; Bacchyl. 3.3, 5.176.
- 9 E.g. *Ol.* 6.20–1; the poet is an *epikouros*, *Ol.* 13.97; *Pae.* 6. 54–7; Murray (2008) 46.
- 10 On Aristodemus, a pupil of Aristarchus (schol. *Nem.* 7.1a), and commentator on Homer, Pindar, Euripides, Theocritus and Apollonius, see Jacoby on *FGrHist* 383 F1, IIIb 173–4; Irigoin (1952) 59–60.
- 11 See also Antipater Thess. 491–92 *GP* = *Anth. Plan.* 305. On variations of the story, see Haldane (1968) 40; Lehnus (1979) 57–68; Borgeaud (1998) 260, n. 6. On the difficulties of interpreting the evidence, see Slater (1971) 141–52; Lefkowitz (2012) 64.
- 12 The song’s opening line ‘law-bringing (*thesmophoros*) mistress of the golden reins’ probably to Demeter because there were cults of Demeter *thesmophoros* in Paros and Aegina (Paus. 6. 91.2,

- 134.2). Another biographer thought that Pindar wrote it for Persephone because the epithet ‘with golden reins’ (*chrysanios*) was one of her husband Hades’ titles, and claimed that Persephone had appeared to Pindar in a dream and told him he would write a song for her when he was about to die (Paus. 9.23. 3–4); see Lefkowitz (2012) 63–4. On such dreams, in which the ghost of a person recently dead appears to a living relative or friend, see especially Dodds (1951) 105: ‘It looks as if the objective visionary dream had struck deep roots not only in the literary tradition but in the popular imagination’.
- 13 Lefkowitz (2012) 97.
 - 14 The information about Dionysius’ collection of relics comes from the third-century BC biographer Hermippus fr. 94 Wehrli = *FGrHist* 1026 F 84; see especially Hanink (2010B) 46–8. Hermippus’ source may have been Philistius of Syracuse, see Bollansée (1999) 122; on other specific details about expense in Hermippus’ biographies, see Bollansée (1999) 160.
 - 15 Ps.-Plu., 1.3–4 West. Gods abduct mortal women from dances also in *Il.* 16.181–3; *Hymn.Hom.* 5. 117–18.
 - 16 Mnesiepes also saw that the divine intervention in Archilochus’ life was recognised in the rituals at the *hērōion* that he founded in the poet’s honor: sacrifices were offered first to the Muses, Apollo Leader of the Muses, and the Muses’ mother Mnemosyne (Cat. E, II, 2.3–4 Clay). On the ‘Mnesiepes inscription’ see also Polly Low, Chapter 7.
 - 17 On the metaphor of honey in early Greek poetry, see especially Nünlist (1998) 300–6.
 - 18 On bee metaphors, see Nünlist (1998) 60–3; also Waszink (1973) 8–9. Leonidas of Tarentum calls the poet Erinna ‘a bee who plucks the Muses’ flowers’ (*HE* 2563–4).
 - 19 See Gow (1950) II 153 (on Theoc. 7.81).
 - 20 Cf. the anapestic lines about Euripides being a misanthrope but his poetry being ‘sweeter than honey or the Sirens’ attributed to Alexander of Aetolia (fr. 7.3 Magnelli = *TrGF* 5.1, T 2.8; Hanink (2008) 121, n. 46). The lines may come from Attic comedy, see Lefkowitz (2012) 96 and 185, n. 38, 194–5, n. 10. But the version in Euripides *Vita* (*TrGF* 5.1, T 1, iii.5) quotes a fragment of an iambic trimeter line about Euripides’ *mouth* being sweeter than honey or the Sirens (even though he had bad breath); see Magnelli (1999) 230–1. Satyrus’ version of the same anecdote omits the honey and Sirens altogether (*TrGF* 5.1, T 103); see Schorn (2004) 332–3.
 - 21 Hermesianax made sure that his audience knew he was talking about Sophocles by mentioning his lover Theoris and the poet’s

- own names in lines 59 and 60. The story about this love affair may itself have been based on the phrase ‘dear is the *theōris* (sacred ship)’ (*TrGF* 4, F 765) in the text of a lost drama; see Olson (2010) 419, n. 413 on Ath. 13.592 ab.
- 22 Cf. Dunbar (1995) 466–7.
 - 23 Maehler (1982) II 181–2; on the connection between bees and poets, see also Davies and Kathirithamby (1986) 70–2; Murray (1996) 117. Horace in *Odes* 4.2.27–32 uses the metaphor to emphasise the amount of work involved in his craft; see Hunter (2012) 96.
 - 24 In Pausanias’ version of the story, bees settled on Pindar’s lips and smeared them with honey (9.23.2); Frazer (1898) V 97. Apparently such things can happen, as Levi (1971) I 357, n. 21 notes: ‘In 1964 I met a vagrant boy who had slept the night among the trees under the akropolis of Athens; he was woken by wild bees which were swarming on his sleeping bag and on his face’.
 - 25 Gow (1950) II 152; cf. also Theoc., *Id.* 1, where a goatherd thanks a shepherd for his song with excessive politeness and deference by saying that the shepherd’s mouth ought to be filled with honey and honeycombs, and that he might eat figs (146–8); Dover (1971) 93; Hunter (1999) 105–6. The infant Zeus also ate from a honeycomb, Call., *Hymn* 1.49; Virg., *Georg.* 4.152.
 - 26 On the text and translation, see Page (1981) 349.
 - 27 On pagan hero cults for poets, see Clay (2004) 63–4, 93–7; on artists as heroes, Kris and Kurz (1979) 13–60, and on the use of mythological narrative patterns in biography, Lefkowitz (2012) 3–5, 129.
 - 28 On such learned women, pagan and Christian, see Momigliano (1985) 331–9; for women *philosophoi* commemorated in inscriptions, see Tod (1957) 140.
 - 29 Presumably he was trying to offer his patroness ‘something slightly different from the standard Platonic handbook’; Tarrant (1993) 20–1, n. 44.
 - 30 For the testimonia on Plato’s connection with Apollo, see Riginos (1976) 9–15.
 - 31 But *horaia* could also mean ready for impregnation, that is, menstruating and no longer lactating after the birth of a previous child (*ta horaia* signifies menstruation in Hippoc., *de Superf.* 34).
 - 32 Coronis’ story was also told in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* (fr. 60–1 M–W). Cf. also Apuleius, *de Platone* 1.1, ‘There are some who say that an apparition of Apollo had intercourse with her’. Plutarch (*Quaest. Conv.* 717 d–e) told a more plausible version in which Apollo appeared to Plato’s mother in a dream.

- 33 Clearchus was a pupil of Aristotle's; nothing is known about the biographer Anaxilides and his work on the philosophers.
- 34 For the testimonia, see Riginos (1976) 15–17.
- 35 On Socratic *hypēresia*, see especially Wildberg (2002) 23–5.
- 36 On *Phaed.* 85b, see Rowe (1993) 120, 202, and dying swans (e.g. Aesch., *Ag.* 1444; other references in Thompson (1895) 106–7); on the hooper (whooping) swan's song, Ar. *Birds* 769–76; Dunbar (1995) 475–7. On swans and Apollo, see also Mineur (1984) 206.
- 37 Soc., Test. SSR I C 87. Riginos (1976) 21, n. 47 suspects that Diogenes may have based his account on a version earlier than those used by Apuleius (*de Plat.* 1.1) and Pausanias (1.30.3); on other versions, see Riginos (1976) 21–5.
- 38 On the notion that the knee (*gonu*, from IE root **gonu*) expresses a physical connection (as if derived from the IE root **genh1*-), see Onians (1954) 173–8; Parvulescu (1997) 74–83; Mallory and Adams (1997) 336.
- 39 Also Plin., *NH* 11.55; Riginos (1976) 17–21.
- 40 Also Val. Max. 1.6. ext. 6; Aelian *V.H.* 10.21, 12.45; Wardle (2008) 297.
- 41 Waszink (1973) 10; Scheinberg (1979) 20; Sourvinou-Inwood (1991) 196–201.
- 42 See especially Braswell (1988) 144. When the Athenians set out to colonise Ionia they were guided by the Muses (often companions of Apollo) in the form of bees (Philostr. *Imag.* II.8.6 = 353K).
- 43 On the identity and powers of these goddesses, see especially Scheinberg (1979) 1–28; Richardson (2010) 219–20.
- 44 Waszink (1973) 10–11.
- 45 Riginos (1976) 49–51.
- 46 For a thorough discussion of why the *Seventh Letter* attributed to Plato is unlikely to be authentic, see especially Souilhé (1977) xl–lviii. Another argument against its authenticity might be that it is so explicitly autobiographical, which would be more characteristic of a work written in Roman times.
- 47 Wilamowitz (1948 [1918]) 3–91; see also Constanze Güthenke, Chapter 2. For a recent assessment of Plato's familiarity with the work of Euripides, see Sansone (1996) 35–67.
- 48 See Bühler (1969) 621.
- 49 Friedländer (1964) I 16; cf. Meyerhoff's translation in Friedländer (1958) 15, who adds the term 'vision': 'How [Plato] found his own way to this vision he suggests in the dialogues by making Socrates lead the way to this goal. Even the man who in the allegory of the cave succeeds in throwing off the chains and making the ascent bears marks of Socrates. For when this man

- returns to those still in chains to “free them and lead them upward”, they “would kill him if only they could lay their hands on him”. Plato could not have said more clearly who was responsible for his own conversion and ascent to that region where he first learned to see the real shadows of real things, then their mirror images, and finally the “things themselves” and the “sun”.
- 50 Misch (1950) I 107. The quotation is taken from the English translation, because it is the latest version of the book and was prepared in collaboration with the author.
- 51 Misch (1950) I 108–9.
- 52 See also Rutherford (1995) 236–7.
- 53 Rutherford (1995) 10–12; Sansone (1996) 35.
- 54 On D.H., *Dem.* 7, see especially Hunter (2012) 169–71, and on Plato’s notion of poets being possessed and ignorant of what they are doing, see Murray (1996) 113–15.
- 55 The phrase is an echo of Theodorus’ description of Theaetetus’ calm approach to learning, *Pl. Tht.* 144b; Russell and Winterbottom (1972) 475; Hunter (2012) 7.
- 56 Cf. Eur., *Hipp.* 563–4: ‘for [Cypris] sends her dreadful blasts everywhere and flies about like a bee’; glossed in the scholion to line 563 as ‘for dread Aphrodite also flies around everywhere like a bee, withering the body’s beauties’. A bee also flies through the meadow sacred to Artemis (*Hipp.* 77).
- 57 Cf. Ar., *Nub.* 974; *Vesp.* 1080. On *anthrēnion* (‘wasp nest’) on the etymology, see Fernandez (1959) 74; Beekes (2010) 105.
- 58 Cf. also Philostr. *Imag.* II.12.4 = 358K, where Philostratus the Younger imagines that the bees dripping honey on the baby Pindar drew back their stings (*kentra*) because they were afraid of hurting him.
- 59 See especially Murray (2008) 168.

CHAPTER 9

THE LIFE OF ARISTIPPUS IN THE *SOCRATIC EPISTLES*: THREE INTERPRETATIONS

KURT LAMPE

Sometime in the second or third century AD an anonymous epistolographer authored a series of letters purporting to pass between Socrates' followers after his death. The most interesting of these are ascribed to Aristippus, who was the notional founder of the sceptical and hedonistic Cyrenaic school of philosophy. Among the key sources for these letters were the collections of anecdotes and sayings that Momigliano has called the 'truest antecedents of biography and autobiography',¹ which continued to make up the bulk of many works actually entitled 'lives of the philosophers' in this period.² It is this biographical aspect of pseudepistolography which merits a discussion of these letters in the present volume. Aristippus does not discuss philosophical theories, but rather his own lifestyle and that of his addressees. This distinction between lifestyle and theory turns out to occupy a prominent place in the scholarship on the historical Aristippus, where it is also presented through the dichotomy between 'performance' or 'art' and 'science'. The Socratic epistles afford us an opportunity to re-examine these dichotomies. The goal of this chapter is therefore to explore several ways in which, while imagining Aristippus' discussion of his 'artful' lifestyle, the epistolographer permits us to reconstruct and evaluate an Aristippean philosophy.

The epistles and existing scholarship on Aristippean ethics

I will begin by offering a provisional reading of ethics in the epistles. There are two guiding questions for this section. First, how can these letters contribute to existing scholarship on Aristippean philosophy? Second, what sort of ethics does

Aristippus defend and display in these letters? In order to motivate these questions, it is first necessary to offer an overview of the relevant passages.

Though Aristippus is the author, recipient, or subject of eleven of the thirty-five epistles, I will be focusing on epistles 8 through 13, which provide the most detailed and coherent portrait. In letter 8 Antisthenes, who was famed in antiquity for his austerity, writes from Athens to Aristippus, who is living it up in the court of Dionysius II of Syracuse.³ Antisthenes writes, 'The philosopher isn't someone who stays with tyrants and devotes himself to Sicilian tables, but rather someone who lives in his own country and desires only what's sufficient' (p. 244.1–3 Malherbe⁴). He urges Aristippus to cure his sybaritic impulses with hellebore, which today we know as an emetic, abortifacient and poison, but which the ancients represent as a cure for everything from melancholia to imprudence.⁵ Aristippus responds in letter 9 with profound irony, thanking Antisthenes for his concern, craving his pity for his pathological hedonism and congratulating Antisthenes on his healthier devotion to pure water, barley bread and a single filthy garment.

Letters 10 and 11 comprise a brief exchange between Aeschines and Aristippus, in which the former asks Aristippus to intercede on behalf of some Locrians who are in trouble with Dionysius, and Aristippus assures him he'll take care of *everything*. But 'don't tell Antisthenes if I've saved your friends', he asks in letter 11, 'since he doesn't like having tyrants for friends, preferring to seek out barley-sellers and tavern-keepers' (248.13–16).

There follows a complaint against Aristippus from Simon the Cobbler. 'I hear you've been mocking my wisdom with Dionysius', he writes in letter 12. 'Well, I admit I'm a cobbler, this is the work I do. All the same, if necessary I'd even cut leather straps to instruct fools who think, against the advice of Socrates, that they should live luxuriously' (250.1–7). Once again, Aristippus responds ironically, advising the leather-cutter that it would be more profitable to cut straps for fashionable Syracusan shoes than for whipping lapsed philosophers. 'Don't you realize', he adds in letter 13, 'that by always wearing shoes I magnify your

business? But Antisthenes always goes barefoot! What does he accomplish other than taking away your work and profit, since he persuades the young and all the Athenians to go barefoot? So consider what a good friend I am by embracing comfort and pleasure' (251.29–252.2).

From this preliminary overview it is already clear that these letters stage a confrontation between Aristippus' lifestyle of suave hedonism and a particularly ascetic version of Cynicism.⁶ We find this same version of Cynicism in most of the pseudonymous letters of Crates and Diogenes of Sinope, one of which is also addressed to Aristippus (Diogenes 32). The confrontation in our letters begins in the exchange with Antisthenes, where Aristippus, rather than respond earnestly to Antisthenes' principled criticism, deflects it with irony. It continues in the exchange with Aeschines, which is explicitly formulated to display the merits of Aristippus' behaviour. It is Aristippus' good relationship with a tyrant, after all, and not Antisthenes' relationships with barley sellers, which will save the lives of the Locrians. Finally, this confrontation reaches its climax in the exchange with Simon, who was probably not a historical figure, but rather a fictional hero of late Cynicism.⁷ Simon converts Antisthenes' verbal lashing into the threat of a physical one, but once again Aristippus refuses to engage with him seriously: he replaces the real grounds for Simon's indignation with an argument about his cobbling business, and then reduces Simon's principled objections to the economics of cutting leather.

Now that I have outlined these letters' content, let me return to my first question: What do these letters contribute to the scholarship on Aristippus? By way of answering, I should explain that according to a recent article by Mann, 'There is nothing to Aristippus' philosophy besides the way he lives his life. That life is not to be explained, but shown'.⁸ This contrast between Aristippus' philosophical performance and the articulate theories of philosophers such as Aristotle recurs throughout the scholarship, going back at least to the 1890s, when von Arnim, Natorp and Gomperz spoke of Aristippus as a *Lebenskünstler* ('artist of living') rather than a *Wissenschaftler*

(‘scientist’) (on this distinction see also Constanze Güthenke, [Chapter 2](#)).⁹ One reason to be suspicious of this distinction is that it projects onto fourth-century philosophy nineteenth-century debates about the study of classical antiquity, whether it ought to be a professional ‘science’ or a paradigm for personal and social transformation. But we need not consign Aristippean ethics to ‘artful’ inarticulacy simply because he prefers characteristic ways of speaking and acting to systematic theory. If we are to appreciate the stature accorded to him by the history of philosophy, we must at least attempt to translate his various performances into some sort of verbal analysis.

First we must say a few words about how these letters capture Aristippus’ performative lifestyle. If we want to move past the dichotomy between showing and telling, we should look for something intelligible that unifies Aristippus’ way of speaking and acting. Here we may recall Demetrius’ often-cited line that ‘It’s almost as a likeness of his own soul that each person writes a letter’ (*De eloc.* 227). This obviously suggests that some sort of psychological paradigm manifests itself in epistolary writing, but this paradigm remains a polysemous metaphor. In order to clarify it, I will initially suggest that we are dealing with the dispositions, intentions and aspirations that make up the letter-writer’s *character*. These can be plotted along a narrative of character development, as in the seventeen letters ascribed to Chion of Heraclea.¹⁰ Or they can be varied by situation, as in the letters of Socrates. The important point is that, whether the character is developing or static, at issue is a recognizable core of selfhood, which is felt to capture something important about an exemplary lifestyle.

Now let us return to the details of Aristippus’ exchange with Antisthenes. In the course of Antisthenes’ brief letter, he packs in an abundance of value terms. As we saw above, he begins by saying what ‘the philosopher’ would do. It is worth quoting the remainder of this brief letter in its entirety (*Epistle 8*):

But you think that where the good man excels is in being able to get wealth and have powerful friends. Yet neither is wealth necessary, nor, if it were necessary, would it be good if acquired in this way, nor can the many and

ignorant be friends, especially when they're tyrants to boot. So I'd advise you to leave Syracuse and Sicily. But if, as some say, you're crazy for pleasure and stuck to things that don't suit prudent men, depart to Anticyra, and a drink of hellebore will help. It's much better than Dionysius' wine. Wine makes you wholly mad, this stops madness. You'd be as much better than you are now as sanity and prudence are better than sickness and folly. Be well. (244.5–19 Malherbe)

In this passage Antisthenes does not so much lay out an argument as hope that Aristippus will recognize himself in the value terms he uses – on the positive side, philosophy, moral goodness, sanity and prudence; on the negative, sickness, folly, madness and loss of control – and that he will draw the appropriate conclusions. Each of these terms implies a vague multitude of dispositions to feel and act, as Antisthenes sometimes makes explicit. For example, he suggests someone committed to 'philosophical' behaviour will be repulsed by Dionysius' luxurious, bibulous symposia. This is a common way of conceiving of character in Greek philosophy, and appears for example in the works of Aristotle. Precisely what makes our purposive actions belong to us, Aristotle suggests in the *Ethics*, is that they arise from the dispositions making up our character.¹¹ When people do not act according to these dispositions, he adds in the *Poetics*, it makes for unintelligible drama, because the characters' thoughts and intentions no longer serve to explain their actions.¹² Antisthenes' gambit is that Aristippus, thinking about the intellectual and emotional commitments implied by these value terms, and considering how they correspond to his own dispositions, will decide that the only intelligible thing for *someone like him* to do is to abandon Dionysius' hospitality. In other words, as he enacts the plot of his life, he should conclude that *this character*, this prudent, philosophical, good and healthy-minded man, cannot intelligibly act otherwise.

This is Antisthenes' persuasive strategy, but of course it does not work. One reason for this failure is that, insofar as Aristippus displays some concern for stability of character, his commitments are not those Antisthenes wants to impute to him. Consider the beginning of his responding letter:

My unhappiness, Antisthenes, is by no means moderate. How am I not going to be unhappy, since I live with a tyrant, eating and drinking extravagantly every day, being anointed with the most delicious perfume, and trailing a long Tarentine cloak? And no one will save me from Dionysius' cruelty, who holds me like a hostage – not a nobody, but a steward of Socratic discourses! And like I said, he feeds me, anoints me, and dresses me like this and neither fears the gods' justice nor feels shame before men, treating me like this! And now it's gone from bad to worse, when he gave me three Sicilian women of outstanding beauty and a pile of money. And I don't know when this man will stop doing these things! (244.21–246.4 Malherbe)

I have quoted at length in order to communicate Aristippus' tone and perspective. Of course it would be ludicrous to read his character straight from his words, which are dripping with irony. But if we borrow Vlastos' interpretation of Socratic irony, we can propose that Aristippus' words present a very simple riddle.¹³ The gist of Vlastos' position is that an ironist's words are intended to carry a meaning other than what is customary. This may be the opposite of the customary meaning, as when we say, 'What a beautiful day!' when it is hailing.¹⁴ For the moment, let us assume this is what Aristippus is doing: he means more or less the opposite of what he is saying. So when he says he is very miserable, he means he is very happy; when he says the tyrant is cruel, he means beneficent; and when he says things have gone from bad to worse, he means things just keep getting better!

We can formulate how this evaluation of the situation relates to Aristippus' sense of selfhood by deepening our engagement with Aristotelian thought, this time in its creative reappropriation by Ricoeur. I said before that character helps determine what a certain sort of person will do in a certain situation: it is what guarantees that his behaviour expresses who he is. We can now add that this grounding of choice in character is just one aspect of an individual's evaluative orientation, which at its horizon encompasses his entire life. Aristotle argues that people *ought* to clarify the sort of life they want to live so that they can orient all their deliberation and action toward achieving this flourishing life.¹⁵ Ricoeur suggests that such an orientation actually *does* emerge from each

individual's oscillating shifts in perspective, during reflection, deliberation and purposive action, between comprehensive goals, habitual practices and particular choices and outcomes.¹⁶ For example, Aristippus might take 'pleasant living' to be his *comprehensive* goal, he might *habitually* prefer the company of tyrants to tradesmen and he might *particularize* this goal and these habits by choosing to eat this fish now, visit a courtesan later, etc. The orientation which arises from such a network is an important aspect of our sense of who we are. Taylor puts this concisely:

To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is formed by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose.¹⁷

With this in mind, we can see more clearly that Aristippus' ironic response is a powerful expression of his identity. Later in the same letter, he writes:

For the madness by which I thoughtlessly came to these absurdities, I curse myself as I deserve, that I should never leave these evils, since at this age and appearing to have some sense I still didn't want to be hungry, cold, in ill repute, and to grow a long beard. (246.18–23 Malherbe)

Here, by ironic negation, Aristippus lays claim to the very characteristics Antisthenes summoned him to identify with – but he orients them toward a different conception of happiness. When he acknowledges his 'madness', 'thoughtlessness' and lack of 'good sense', of course he means that he both values and believes he possesses the contraries of these characteristics: a healthy mind, good counsel and sound sense. For the 'evils' that he mentions are of course goods, namely the tyrant's friendship, elegant clothes, fine food, beautiful women and delicious perfumes; and he is employing his healthy mind, good counsel and good sense to pursue and preserve these goods. In affirming these excellences of character with reference to these general dispositions and particular choices, Aristippus expresses who he is. This identity is further articulated in his statement that he shares 'Socratic teachings' with

Dionysius, and in his assurance to Aeschines that, through his friendship with Dionysius, he will save the Locrians. Aristippus is not just a versatile servant of his own bodily pleasures, he is also someone who embraces philosophical reflection and can be counted on to help his friends.

By now I hope that the way in which these letters present Aristippus' lifestyle is becoming clearer: we are not dealing with a developmental narrative, but rather a consistent ethical orientation which expresses itself in actions or sayings and gives them meaning.¹⁸ I promised also to consider how this life articulates an Aristippean ethics, and we have made some progress in that direction as well. For we have not only explained how the interaction of comprehensive, intermediate and particular goals defines any given life, we have also begun to fill in this scheme with particularly Aristippean values: at the most comprehensive level, a life of refined pleasure; at the intermediate level, the excellences of sanity, good counsel, good sense and helping your friends; at the particular level, a series of pleasant experiences, unruffled management of criticism and effective action on Aeschines' behalf.

On the other hand, it would be foolish to make too much of these results. It is all very well to say that life is about refined pleasure achieved through sanity, wisdom and integrity, but the real mystery of Aristippus' life is how he makes these things come together. This is what Gomperz calls Aristippus' 'virtuosity in the art of living'.¹⁹ And it is not yet clear whether these letters resolve this mystery. So at this point let us turn to another aspect of the letters, namely their humorous dimension.

Irony and humour

Aristippus' brand of humour is very unusual in pseudonymous philosophers' epistles. The letters ascribed to Socrates, Diogenes, Crates or Heraclitus share Aristippus' low level of doctrinal subtlety and argumentative rigor, but combine this with an oppressive seriousness of which Aristippus is happily innocent. This calls for some sort of commentary.

What difference can it make when a philosopher addresses substantial ethical topics with humour rather than painstaking gravity or hortatory vehemence? At least three possibilities occur to me. First, in company with the irony to which it is akin, humour may imply claims about the status of knowledge. Second, humour may affect the attitudes of listeners, and thus help persuade them to agree with you, to like you, and perhaps to do what you want. Third, humour may encourage reflection. Here I will try to understand Aristippus' irony and humour as elements in dynamic interaction with ethical beliefs and goals. This will involve experimentation with very charitable readings, which will require qualification later; but it will also lay the groundwork for the third section.

Let me begin by revisiting the scholarship on Socratic irony, which again provides a suggestive template for Aristippus. While irony is not always humorous, we have already seen that Aristippus' tendency not to say what he means involves jokes at the expense of Antisthenes and Simon. Back in his response to Antisthenes, for example, he advises his recipient to 'Bathe and drink from the Nine Spouts fountain, and wear the same filthy cloak summer and winter, as befits a free man living democratically' (246.10–13). Obviously Aristippus does *not* think that these are marks of 'freedom', and part of his intention is to mock Antisthenes for thinking so. Earlier I suggested that Aristippus' irony amounts to saying the contrary of what he means, but now I would like to observe that it is often more complicated than that. As Nehamas writes:

Irony often insinuates that something is taking place inside you that your audience is not allowed to see, but it does not always entail that you see it yourself. Irony often communicates that only a part of a picture is visible to an audience, but it does not always entail that the speaker sees the whole. Sometimes, it does not even imply that a whole picture exists.²⁰

We can explain Nehamas' claim by contrasting Antisthenes and Simon with Aristippus. Antisthenes is so vehemently certain he 'sees the whole picture' that he not only tells Aristippus

what a 'good' and 'philosophical' man ought to do; he also urges him to 'cure' himself with a poisonous 'medicine'. Simon is even ready to 'instruct' Aristippus with a leather whip. By contrast, Aristippus makes no real effort to persuade either Antisthenes or Simon of the soundness of his own beliefs. In the text that I have just quoted, for example, he obviously means to contest the meaning of 'freedom' and its relations to tyranny, democracy, self-indulgence and self-denial. In fact, he emphasizes this disagreement in the closing lines of the letter: 'Meanwhile keep going to talk with Simon the cobbler. There neither exists nor is likely to exist anyone better for you in terms of wisdom. As for me, I've been forbidden to approach tradesmen, since *I am under someone else's power*' (246.29–33, my emphasis). Here again Aristippus mocks Antisthenes' conceptions of freedom and power. So why does he not explain his own beliefs about these things? Of course, part of the reason may be that he considers Antisthenes and Simon beneath instruction, or beyond persuasion. But it is also worth asking whether Aristippus has a more fundamental reason for refusing to articulate his position.

Consider another passage from his letter to Antisthenes: 'It's good of you to be upset over others' unhappiness. I too will take pleasure in your happiness, so that I'll seem to reciprocate and repay the favour' (246.4–7). Here Aristippus does not simply mean the contrary of what he says. For example, he may indeed mean that Antisthenes acts *badly* to sympathize with him, since in fact he requires no sympathy; but it is dubious whether he cares about Antisthenes' so-called 'happiness'. And the clause about reciprocity is humorous nonsense, since it rests on premises about their respective happiness that Aristippus does not accept. But that does not mean it is *merely* nonsense. By reducing the entire exchange to absurdity, we could say that Aristippus is stepping back from this entire business of arguing about who is happier than who, especially since at issue is not justice or courage, but diet, dress, perfume, sex and everything that falls under the heading of temperance. He is not necessarily denying the fruitfulness of reflective conversations, since he mentions that he is a 'steward of

Socratic discourses'; nor is he suspending evaluative judgement, since we have seen that he has a coherent ethical orientation. But he deflates Antisthenes' attack without justifying himself or attempting to persuade his antagonist. It is just possible, if we return to Nehamas' conception of irony, that part of the reason for which Aristippus adopts this strategy is because he does not 'see the whole picture', and is not certain it can be seen. In other words, it is possible that Aristippus feels he is happy, but is not confident he can systematically articulate the nature of that happiness. This suggestion rests on thin evidence within the letters, but it receives support from the dogmatic scepticism we know the Cyrenaic school professed. The Aristippus of these letters would then be what Mann proposes the historical Aristippus was, someone who believed that 'philosophical argumentation is inadequate for settling philosophical disputes'.²¹ This could partially explain his bemused disengagement from the arguments Antisthenes and Simon are attempting to start.²²

I turn now from theories of irony to theories of humour, which will open up two additional interpretative avenues. The first begins from Freud's theory of 'tendentious' jokes, in which the humourist expresses aggression toward the 'butt' of the joke for the amusement of himself and some third-person audience.²³ For example, look again at Aristippus' humorous self-criticism:

For the madness by which I thoughtlessly came to these absurdities, I curse myself as I deserve, that I should never leave these evils, since at this age and appearing to have some sense I still didn't want to be hungry, cold, in ill repute, and to grow a long beard.

Aristippus' intended audience should enjoy a smile *with* Aristippus *against* Antisthenes, since Antisthenes willingly suffers cold, hunger, disrepute and unkempt hair for the sake of his highly contestable principles. Freud thinks tendentious jokes require an audience because the humourist himself invests a lot of effort in overcoming the inhibition of his aggressive impulses, the liberation of which the audience can enjoy without any such effort. Humourist and audience

then share the total upwelling of pleasure from this liberated aggression.²⁴ But this is a one-dimensional view of humour. More than just the pleasurable liberation of hostility, what Aristippus elicits from his audience is a feeling of intimacy created by shared knowledge and attitudes. Cohen argues:

When you offer your joke, you solicit [your auditor's] knowledge, you elicit it, in fact, virtually against their will, and they find themselves contributing the background that will make the joke work. Thus they join you. And they join you again, if the joke works, in their response, and the two of you find yourselves a community, a community of amusement.²⁵

In Aristippus' case, the audience must grasp that his 'curse' is more like a 'prayer', that in saying he 'deserves' what he gets, he's boasting rather than acknowledging his faults, and that the 'good sense' he mentions should direct him to choose what he ironically labels evils (fine foods and beautiful women), not what he labels goods (rigorous austerity). The audience must not only understand all this, they must share the attitudes presumed by this double-speak. Simon the Cobbler, for example, would not find this funny. But for those who do, the humour creates a feeling of connection and sympathy, and can therefore contribute to Aristippus' ability to disarm critics and ingratiate himself with potential patrons. In other words, this mode of philosophical discussion could be an element of Aristippus' mysteriously felicitous 'art of living', which somehow combines integrity and dignity with hedonism and the cultivation of the wealthy and powerful.

It is also possible that Aristippus' humour has a third, more reflective purpose. One function of humour can be to disrupt normative ways of thinking and behaving. This begins at the semantic level, where we have already seen Aristippus' reduction of ethical debate to nonsense. Here it is worth mentioning Freud's argument that there exists a pure delight in absurdity, since it liberates the speaker and sympathetic listeners from the laborious task of making sense.²⁶ But more important is the capacity of jokes, as Douglas has emphasized, to express alternatives to the norms active in any situation.²⁷ Bracht Branham has applied this theory to the Cynic

Diogenes, whose antinomian antics, ranging from syllogisms that infer the legitimacy of cannibalism to an oration punctuated by shitting on stage, pretty obviously represent *alternative* ways of configuring accepted values.²⁸ Freud actually calls anti-institutional humour ‘Cynic’, so it is ironic that in our epistles it is Antisthenes’ way of choosing friends and moderating enjoyment that is closer to the norm. Aristippus’ humour may help listeners not only to reject Antisthenes’ austerity, but also to accept his own unabashed hedonism. Even a sympathetic audience, for example, may not otherwise be ready to admit that they would like to ‘stay with a tyrant, eating and drinking luxuriously every day, anointing themselves with some of the most exquisite perfumes, and trailing long Tarentine robes’. Aristippus’ choice to communicate these desires via humour could allow his audience to recognize their intuitive hedonism. Hence we could propose that Aristippus’ humour not only creates the intimacy of shared attitudes, it might even lead his audience reflectively to affirm disavowed attitudes and consider re-organizing their values.²⁹

We have now explored three ways of understanding the role humour plays in Aristippus’ ‘virtuosity in the art of living’. As an expression of irony, I suggested that it could be a signal that Aristippus distrusts system-builders and dogmatism. As an expression of tendentious humour, it could connect him with an audience in the shared release of aggression and the shared intimacy of knowledge and attitudes. Finally, it could also be a way of encouraging listeners to consider whether they agree with Aristippus. All of these are possibilities for a charitable reading of Aristippean ethics in these epistles.

But at this point I should acknowledge that it is hard to pin down the third-person audience the jokes require. If this is a private letter, is the audience imaginary? Are we to surmise that Aristippus wrote the letters with publication in mind? Both are possible, but we can also solve this puzzle by ascribing the audience, like the humour, to the epistolographer behind the fiction. Next, I will focus on how the author’s creative reimagining of Aristippus serves his own subtle purposes.

The epistolographer's perspective

In order to investigate the epistolographer's perspective I must say a little more about the epistles' probable authorship and date.³⁰ Two discrete corpora make up most of the Socratic collection. First, letters 1–7 are ascribed to Socrates. They are written in smooth and urbane Attic, focus zealously on banal moralizing and rely heavily on Xenophon and Plato's *Apology*. Letters 8–27, by contrast, are ascribed to Socrates' real or fictional disciples. They mix slightly awkward Attic with what, probably due to accidents of transmission, looks like inconsistent Doric. They do not present any unified ethical outlook, much less concern themselves with straight-forward moralizing. Rather, they appear more concerned with biographical and antiquarian ornamentation. Their author draws not only on Xenophon and Plato's *Apology*, but also on many other Platonic dialogues and letters, works of Plutarch and on some sort of biographical and anecdotal collection such as that of Diogenes Laertius.

The letters of Aristippus belong to this second corpus, the provenance of which remains murky. Malherbe lumps them in with almost all pseudonymous philosophers' letters under the heading 'Cynic Epistles'.³¹ But given the diversity and chronological expanse of ancient Cynicism, this category would be of little explanatory value even if there were reason to believe our letters were written by self-identifying Cynics.³² Obens and Sykutris are more convincing in ascribing them to 'a Platonizing orator or a rhetorically schooled Platonist' of the second or third centuries AD.³³ Of obvious relevance for this ascription are the exercises in 'characterization' (*ethopoiia*) and 'impersonation' (*prosopopoiia*) in all the surviving elementary handbooks of rhetorical education from the Roman empire. In these exercises students were asked what a certain sort of character would say in a certain situation, for example, a man when leaving his wife for a journey; or what a historical or mythical character should have said on a particular occasion, for example, Alexander before the battle of Issus. These exercises could also take epistolary form.³⁴ Well-educated adults

sometimes continued to produce ‘characterized’ or ‘impersonated’ speeches and letters, the object of which was the display of wit, erudition and mental agility.³⁵ Our author’s handling of Attic and Doric, neither of which resembles the spoken Greek of the period, his numerous literary and philosophical allusions and his liberal use of obscure personal and place names all help to situate his letters in this domain of conspicuous and competitive *paideia*.³⁶

Looking at the letters as specimens of rhetorical *epideixis* opens up several interpretative possibilities. The first is that their author uses Aristippus as a mouthpiece to sketch a critique of Cynicism. This would be an opportunity not only to display his philosophical learning, but also – behind a veil of ‘figured speech’ – to defend his own lifestyle and criticize its real or imaginary detractors.³⁷ After all, the Cynics’ radical notion of ‘freedom’ excluded reliance on Roman patrons, not only Sicilian tyrants; and their radical notion of ‘nature’ excluded the laborious education and exquisite satisfactions of imperial sophistry, not only Aristippus’ carnal luxury. Speaking of Aelius Aristides’ critique of Plato, Anderson writes, ‘As so often the sophist is in his element in an imaginary court, winning hands down against his long-deceased but remarkably resilient rival’.³⁸ Similarly, Antisthenes’ Cynic position, poorly defended by its boorish proponent, is annihilated by our learned epistolographer. Cynicizers of his own time are swept away by the same attack.

But our author’s purposes are surely not exhausted in a serious critique of Cynicism, which corresponds to the arguments that I reconstructed in section one. We should also reconsider the letters’ tendentious humour, which I explored in section two. Insofar as Cynics remain the butt of these jokes, we can say that it is now the epistolographer rather than Aristippus who shares with his audience the pleasure of disinhibited aggression and the intimacy of common judgements. But is Aristippus himself immune from this implicit criticism? Granted, the author seems to imply that hedonism, humour and accommodation to the power structures of the real world are better than asceticism, self-righteous vehemence and an

inhuman crusade to 'free' oneself from every sort of cultural constraint. To this extent Aristippus is recuperated as a model for the epistolographer's own aspirations. But even if he treats Aristippus more sympathetically than the other philosophers, we need not take him to endorse Aristippus' beliefs and lifestyle wholeheartedly.

Indeed, there are grounds for thinking that he intends to present Aristippus' ironic disengagement from principled debate, which I earlier suggested was an expression of epistemic diffidence, in a rather less favourable light. For example, Aristippus implicitly claims that friendship with Dionysius is a great thing, since it both provides him with luxury and enables him to save Aeschines' Locrian friends. But anyone who has read Plato's *Seventh Letter* (as our author probably has) might find Aristippus smugly overconfident. Does he really think a quick mind and a good sense of humour will allow him to navigate the intrigues of tyrannical Syracuse? Perhaps we should see Aristippus' glib nonchalance as the flip-side to Antisthenes' vehement asceticism: both are immoderately one-sided, so the extravagant promises each makes about securing happiness are laughable.

It would then be significant that when we last see Aristippus in this collection, in letter 27, he is dying on the island of Lipara. His daughter has been sending him requests for help with the Cyrenean government, but Aristippus has not been able to provide any. 'I received a series of letters from you', he says:

in which you asked me to come to you as soon as possible in Cyrene. You say you're not being well treated by the inspectors, nor is your husband able to handle the matter, since he's a very respectful type and unaccustomed to political troubles. I myself was trying to get Dionysius to release me to sail to you when fate intervened, and I fell ill at Lipara. (282.2–9 Malherbe)

First, what is Aristippus doing on Lipara? The island is off the north coast of Sicily, the opposite of the direction Aristippus should be sailing if he wants to return to Cyrene. This may be the epistolographer's little joke: one meaning of the adjective *liparos* is 'rich, comfortable, easy', just like Aristippus.³⁹ This

is not the only possible pun in the letter. The phrase I have translated ‘fell ill’ (*malakōs eschon*) could also be rendered ‘became cowardly, soft, indulgent, like a *kinaidos*’: the adjective *malakos* has many negative connotations.⁴⁰ Moreover, the name of Aristippus daughter is Arētē, which is close enough to *aretē*, or ‘virtue’, to be an easy pun. So, dying in his flaccid and unctuous luxury, Aristippus receives an imploring letter from his daughter, but cannot go to ‘Virtue’s’ aid. She has been asking for practical help, and what he offers her are some platitudes about the preciousness of the philosophy he has imparted and some bizarre advice about moving to Athens and playing Aristippus to Xanthippe’s Socrates. It is tempting to read this as so much gaseous blathering: unable at this key moment to manipulate Dionysius, engage with the political actors in Cyrene, or help his daughter and grandson, Aristippus falls back on the comfortingly vague optimism of his world of words.

So we need not take Aristippus’ cheerful evasion of principled debate as an expression of epistemic diffidence. Rather, his facile optimism may be another object of the epistolographer’s subtle and humorous criticism. Aristippean hedonism is better than Cynic austerity, but suffers from the same impractical one-sidedness.⁴¹ The only person with a realistic and practical understanding of the situations in these letters is the author – and of course you, dear readers, if you get the jokes.

Conclusions

I began from the suggestion in the scholarship that Aristippus was an ‘artist of living’ rather than a thinker, so that nothing substantial could be said about his ethics. The conception of philosophy as an ‘art’ is most often associated with the European tradition after Nietzsche. It frequently relies on the premise that ‘truth’ in general is an intersubjective construction, from which the ‘authentic’ individual must emerge through a courageous act of will, transformative commitment to libidinal drives, or spiritual exercise and self-elaboration. These premises are foreign to ancient philosophy. Nevertheless, there are

strong lines of resemblance and influence between ancient philosophical 'crafts of living' and post-Nietzschean ideals of artful self-creation.⁴² Most important for our purposes, ancient ethics generally aims to articulate and satisfy inchoate existential impulses through the simultaneous development of reflective theories and deliberate manners of speaking, thinking, feeling and acting. Artful behaviour and forceful reasoning are thus complementary, not disjunctive.

I have argued that the artfulness of Aristippus in the Socratic epistles lends itself to discursive explanation in several ways. In my first section I fleshed out the character and evaluative orientation implied by these letters. Since this did not seem fully to capture Aristippus' artistry, I next focused on the letters' unusually humorous dimension. The epistemic implications and interpersonal effects of Aristippean wit and irony enriched our appreciation of his philosophy, but also pointed toward the epistolographer behind the fiction. Thus I concluded by addressing how this creative reimagination serves its author, who both appropriates Aristippus' beliefs and jokes and implicitly tops them with his playful critique.

Not all these readings are compatible, so where does that leave us? It would be a mistake to try to pull together all the loose ends in this analysis, since one of the characteristics of biography-as-philosophy is that it does not lend itself to the closed systematicity of theory. Instead, it presents its readers with a core of beliefs and tendencies amenable to various levels of analysis and critique. In pseudonymous works such as these, the perspective of the real author and his readers adds an additional layer of complexity. In this particular case, there is no reason to deny that even the epistolographer and his notional audience could toggle between admiring Aristippus' versatility and wit and looking down on his shortcomings. This indeterminacy is far from confirming Mann's judgement that Aristippean philosophy 'is not to be explained, but shown'. This is so only if we think that 'philosophical explanation' necessarily aims at producing a single and definitive interpretation. If we accept instead that philosophy may aim to explain a variety of lines of thought provoked by ethically engaged behaviour,

then we should say that there is a great deal to be explained in Aristippus' behaviour in these letters. With appropriate modifications, the same will be true of much of the semi-fictional and semi-biographical material that makes up our evidence for the historical Aristippus.

Notes

- 1 Momigliano (1971) 23.
- 2 On biographies of philosophers and the anecdotal tradition, see Tsouna-McKirahan (1994) 387–91; Mann (1996) 105–12; Mansfeld (1994) 179–91; Branham (1989) 58–63; Goldhill (2009) 96–113.
- 3 Dionysius II reigned ca. 367–356 and 346–344 BC. As Obens (1912) 19–20, Köhler (1928) 103 and Sykutris (1933) 50–1 agree, the fictional date of letters 10–11 is 361 BC. I presume that letters 8–9 share this date.
- 4 I use the page and line numbering from Malherbe (1977).
- 5 In fact Theophrastus recognizes two sorts of hellebore, black and white, which have different properties (*Hist. pl.* 9.10.4).
- 6 Hodkinson (2007) 287 and 298 notes that juxtaposing different viewpoints is one thing that epistolary collections do well.
- 7 See Sellars (2003b).
- 8 Mann (1996) 119.
- 9 Natorp (1895) 904; Arnim (1898) 23; Gomperz (1905) 213. Compare Giannantoni (1958) 23, 42–54, 70–3.
- 10 See Düring (1951); Konstan and Mitsis (1990); Trapp (2006) 44–6.
- 11 See especially *NE* 3.1–5.
- 12 See especially *Po.* 6, 15 with the commentary of Halliwell (1986) 138–67. For a fascinating elaboration of what Aristotle leaves unsaid in both works, see Ricoeur (1990) 89–94 and 140–68.
- 13 I draw on theories of Socratic irony because they are among the most fully developed theories of irony available and because Aristippus' beliefs and interests loosely resemble those of his one-time companion. However, I acknowledge that there are also differences. I develop and diversify my interpretation of Aristippean irony later in this chapter.
- 14 Strictly speaking, Vlastos (1987) only speaks of 'complex irony' as 'riddling'.
- 15 *NE* 1.1–2. For the practicalities of this orientation, see especially 3.1–5, 6.1–5.

- 16 Ricoeur (1990) 152–80.
- 17 Taylor (1989) 27.
- 18 This bears some similarity to what Dickson (2009) proposes for the ‘autobiographical’ content of Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations*.
- 19 See above n. 9.
- 20 Nehamas (1998) 67.
- 21 Mann (1996) 113.
- 22 My suggestion for Aristippus bears a superficial similarity to Critchley’s *risus purus* in (2002) 93–111. Much of Aristippus’ humour also fits with Freud’s musings in ‘Humour’, *SE* 21: 160–6 = (1961a), which inspires Critchley’s position.
- 23 *SE* 8: 100.
- 24 *SE* 8: 155–6. Ancient theorists of humour were also keenly aware of its aggressive aspect (Halliwell (2008) 19–38 and 264–331).
- 25 Cohen (1999) 40. Compare Gaut (1998) 52–4 on the ‘attitudinal structure’ manifested by a series of jokes.
- 26 Freud *SE* 8: 125–7.
- 27 Douglas (1968) 361–76.
- 28 Branham (1996), which draws on enlightening discussions in Branham (1989) esp. 11–63.
- 29 Compare Gaut (1998) 66–7.
- 30 With this paragraph see Sykutris (1931) 981–7; (1933) 112–21.
- 31 Malherbe (1977) 27–34.
- 32 Pace Köhler’s (1928) remark that ‘Die kynische Tendenz in den meisten Briefen ist unverkennbar’ (The Cynic bent in most of the letter is unmistakable’) (5), Sykutris (1933) rightly notes ‘eine gewisse Abneigung gegen das grobe Auftreten und den Schmutz der Kyniker (trotz 20)’ (‘A certain aversion to the unkempt appearance and grubbiness of the Cynics (despite 20)’ (113).
- 33 Quotation from Sykutris (1933) 121. Cf. Obens (1912) 6 and 66–78 and Köhler (1928) 4–5.
- 34 The surviving elementary rhetorical handbooks are assembled and translated by Kennedy (2003). The extension of *ethopoiia* into letter-writing is suggested by Theon, *Exercises*, 115 and Nicolaus the Sophist, *Preliminary Exercises*, 67. On the extent of common acquaintance with Plato in the ‘Second Sophistic’, see de Lacy (1974).
- 35 See Whitmarsh (2005) 20–1 with further references.
- 36 On the epistles’ use of obscure names see Sykutris (1933) 115–16.
- 37 On *logoi eskhematismenoi* see Whitmarsh (2001) 57–9.
- 38 Anderson (1993) 141. The reference is to Aristides’ *Or.* 2, *Against Plato in Defence of Rhetoric*. Among our author’s probable contemporaries Lucian (especially *Vit. Auct.*, *Herm.*, *Symp.*, *DMeretr.* 10) and Alciphron (esp. 3.9, 4.7, 4.17) come closer to

our letters' combination of erudition, humour and criticism of philosophy and philosophers.

- 39 LSJ s.v. λιπαρός, def. III. I thank an audience member at Durham University, where I delivered a version of this chapter, for this suggestion.
- 40 LSJ s.v. μαλακός def. III.2; for 'fell ill', see III.3.
- 41 George Boys-Stones suggests to me that this confirms that our epistolographer has Platonist leanings: Antisthenes and Aristippus between them stand for the bankruptcy of Stoic, Cynic and Epicurean philosophy as alternatives to Platonism.
- 42 Nehamas (1998) explores some of these. For broader discussion of ancient philosophies as crafts of living, see Hadot (1995) and (2002); Sellars (2003a). Foucault (2005), (2010) and (2011) are also well worth reading in this regard, especially since they straddle the fuzzy line between scholarship on ancient philosophy and 'creative' modern philosophy.

IMAGINATION DEAD IMAGINE: DIOGENES LAERTIUS' WORK OF MOURNING

RICHARD FLETCHER

Mourning: not a crushing oppression, a jamming (which would suppose a 'refill'), but a painful availability: I am *vigilant*, expectant, awaiting the onset of a 'sense of life'.¹

The deaths of Roland Barthes: *his* deaths, that is, those of his relatives, those deaths that must have inhabited him, situating places and solemn moments, orienting tombs in his inner space (ending – and probably even beginning – with his mother's death). *His* deaths, those he lived in the plural, those he must have linked together, trying in vain to 'dialectize' them before the 'total' and 'undialectical' death; those deaths that always form in our lives a terrifying and endless series.²

Diogenes Laertius' *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* shares something vital with both Roland Barthes' mourning diary and Jacques Derrida's work of mourning. These texts all dwell on how the singular reaction to and narrative account of a singular death (of mother, friend or philosopher) is inevitably part of a series of deaths (of relatives, friends or philosophers). Furthermore, the challenge for Diogenes, Barthes and Derrida is to explain how death in its singular and plural forms is an intrinsic part of a life and living. Yet what separates Diogenes' work of mourning from that of Barthes and Derrida is his uncannily deadpan humour when facing the dying philosophers he writes about, specifically employed through the medium of the poetic form of the epigram as epitaph.

It is precisely this conception of the work of mourning that I want to explore in my reading of the ill-fated poetic output of Diogenes Laertius, which consists in the selections from his collection (or collections) called *Epigrammata* or *Pammetros* ('Epigrams or In Various Metres'), interspersed throughout his

monumental *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers*.³ It has been well-documented that Diogenes' work emphasizes the deaths, as much as the lives, of Greek philosophers.⁴ Central to any discussion of Diogenes and death is the role played by his poetic works scattered throughout his biographical narratives, works which I will dub his biographical death-poems. Since the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, these poems have been generally criticized, either as bad poetry or tasteless or, perhaps worst of all, as a flimsy rationale for the composition of the work as a whole.⁵ Nietzsche also called them 'burial inscriptions' (*Sepucralinschriften*) and dubbed Diogenes the clumsy night watchman of philosophy.⁶ However, there have been a few corners from which these poems have been defended. The most common rehabilitation has been that these poems offer a way of encapsulating a philosopher's thought, often at the very moment of his death.⁷ When read in relation to Diogenes' summaries of philosophers' doctrines, the death-scene becomes a test-case: did the philosopher practice what he preached? Or at the philosopher's final hour, does philosophical affiliation mean anything, or are we all just hypocrites when faced with death? It is precisely this philosophical reading of Diogenes' poems that benefits from the approach to biography that has been taken throughout this volume. If writing the life of a creative person enacts an equally creative engagement with the creative work produced by that life, Diogenes' poems, in their slight and offhand way, have a pivotal role to play in the constructive reception of philosophical thought in the form of biography. Nonetheless, both of these means of revitalising the study of Diogenes' poems avoid two key issues: their very status as poems and their use of humour.

As their preservation in the seventh book of *The Greek Anthology* testifies, Diogenes' poems were viewed in antiquity as belonging to the genre of the funerary epigram.⁸ One of the characteristics of such epigrams is a focus on the manner of death.⁹ However, if you read through the representative epigrams from the *Anthology*, direct references as to the manner and circumstances of death are few and far between.¹⁰ This

novel aspect of Diogenes' biographical death-poems can also, however, be understood in relation to more common elements (or *topoi*) that tie his poems to the sepulchral genre (e.g. addressing the dead, calling on the gods). However, these elements associated with the genre of funerary epigram are at the same time those elements which give the epigrams the semblance of a personal voice, seemingly offering us some tantalising evidence about their author.¹¹ Taken together, the differences and similarities of Diogenes' poems with respect to other funerary epigrams offer an important insight into how they can be interpreted. On the one hand, Diogenes puts himself in the position of mourning the dead philosophers, according to the generic conventions of the sepulchral epigram. On the other hand, the focus on the death of the philosopher is the way these poems pronounce on philosophical issues. It is precisely the element of humour that mediates between these two positions, i.e. between exegetical and philosophical and personal and literary, and, as I will argue, this humour is potentially grounded in an Epicurean attitude towards death and mourning.

But before addressing the tricky issue of Diogenes' comic Epicurean poetry, let us first explore this nexus of biography, philosophy and humour in the question of death by considering an example from the work of a contemporary philosopher who has dedicated his work to the interrelationship of these very ideas.

Very little ... Almost nothing: Critchley's deadpan

Even though the end of Samuel Beckett's *Film* does not portray the death of its main character (played by the aging comic genius Buster Keaton) it still remains a potent meditation on the aporia of death. As in other works, Beckett makes *Film* to reflect on the impossibility of death, as well as the impossibility of life, in its wake.¹² The concluding shots of *Film* move from Keaton's hand-covered face, as his rocking-chair gradually comes to a halt, to the close-up of an eye, which was the same image that had opened the film only some

20 minutes earlier. It is this juxtaposition of Keaton's immobility and the repetition of the beginning of the film that contemporary philosopher, Simon Critchley, has dubbed 'the endless living on' that constitutes the aporia of death. As Critchley notes, this tension pervades Beckett's corpus:

[A]s every reader of Beckett knows, his protagonists rarely die, and it is in this inability to die, this endless living on, that Beckett's entire comedy consists, witness Vladimir and Estragon trying, but failing, to hang themselves in *Waiting for Godot*. In tragedy, people die; in comedy people live; in Beckett's tragic-comedy people who want to die are condemned to live on. Funny isn't it?¹³

Death and humour are more intimately intertwined in the case of *Film*, however, on account of both the cinematic medium and the casting of one of the greatest comic actors in the starring role. The ghost-world of film has been well established, as has the gulf between Keaton's role of Beckett and his previous celluloid presence. These two ideas blend together in Rosette Lamont's description of Keaton in *Film* as a 'sad-funny *pince sans rire*' and a 'ghost-like mourner'; as the epitome of deadpan.¹⁴ As Lamont comments in an earlier article: '*Film* was made with Buster Keaton, but the famous deadpan expression was not to be seen until the very end'.¹⁵ It is these two descriptions of Keaton as 'ghost-like mourner' and 'famous deadpan expression' that frame the main question of the present essay: how does philosophical biography, in the act of mourning the dead, at one and the same time affirm the living? In other words, how can the figure of the mourner come to represent the 'endless living on', the aporia of death? Furthermore, what role does laughter play in all of this? Does Beckett's holding-back of Keaton's deadpan constitute a comic act in itself?

One way to offer an initial answer to these questions is to look at a creative reception of *Film* that trades on both Keaton's former comedic glories and his ghostly, mournful role in Beckett's film. Long before the Oscar-nominated *12 Years a Slave* (2013), the British artist and filmmaker Steve McQueen made a 4-minute film called *Deadpan* (1997). In a sequence of

repeated scenes, we encounter the filmmaker as actor recreating the famous house collapsing escape-scene of Keaton's *Steamboat Bill Jr* (1928). The static McQueen recalls Keaton's immobility at the end of *Film*, rather than its immediate, comic model. Yet his own 'deadpan' freezes the essence of Keaton's comic persona. In this way, McQueen's film offers the precise meeting point between the comic roles of Buster Keaton and his performance in Beckett's *Film*. It is McQueen, I would argue, more so than Beckett, who offers a powerful model for a work of mourning for Critchley, a work that at one and the same time evokes the life (Keaton's comic persona) and death (Keaton in *Film*) in terms of a personalized and humorous commentary on both.¹⁶

At the opening of his book *How to Stop Living and Start Worrying: Conversations with Carl Cederström*, Simon Critchley is asked about the relation between philosophy and biography, and responds as follows:

I think that there's an essential connection between biography and philosophy. The standard version of the history of philosophy begins with Socrates, with a life and a death. It begins with four dialogues by Plato (*Apology*, *Euthyphro*, *Crito* and *Phaedo*), on the trial and execution of Socrates. These dialogues give us a picture of Socrates' life, his teachings and, significantly, the manner of his death at the hands of the Athenian authorities. Philosophy begins with an act of political assassination. We shouldn't forget that. As is clear from a later text like Diogenes Laertius' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, in the ancient world philosophy had an intimate connection with biography. The biography was a kind of propaedeutic to philosophy. If philosophy was a way of life, then the lives of the philosophers were essential objects of study. You can point to other examples of the way in which biography persists in relation to philosophy all the way up to Spinoza, where, on the one hand, we don't know much about Spinoza's life, but then, in the years after his death, three biographies appeared. He became a sort of atheist saint. And then, with someone like Nietzsche, where the life and work get confused, where in a sense the life is the work and the work is the life.¹⁷

Critchley's brief account of the relationship between philosophy and biography is more than just a general description of the phenomenon; it contains subtle reference to and reanimates his work up until this very point. His mentions of the death of Socrates as an 'act of political assassination' and to

Spinoza as a 'sort of an atheist saint' both look back to one of his first books, *Very Little . . . Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*. In that book he begins his account of nihilism with the issue of disappointment as the origin of philosophy:

Where does philosophy begin? It begins, I believe, in an experience of *disappointment*, that is both *religious* and *political*. That is to say, philosophy might be said to begin with two problems: (i) religious disappointment provokes the problem of *meaning*, namely, what is the meaning of life in the absence of religious belief?; and (ii) political disappointment provokes the problem of *justice*, namely, 'what is justice' and how might justice become effective in a violently unjust world?¹⁸

These ideas can be traced back to Critchley's formative engagement with the ethical thought of Emmanuel Levinas, as well as the overall deconstructive project of Jacques Derrida. Critchley would later acknowledge that *Very Little . . . Almost Nothing* was written after the death of his own father, and in this way, it was itself a 'work of mourning'.¹⁹ In his next book, *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity: Essays on Levinas, Derrida and Contemporary French Thought*, Critchley makes the following claims for mourning – moving from the Freudian to the Derridean sense of the term:

In mourning, the self is consumed by the pain of the other's death and is possessed by the alterity of that which it cannot possess: absence of the beloved. Might not the death of the beloved, of love itself, and the work of mourning be the basis for a non-Christian and non-dialectical ethicality and friendship?²⁰

Derrida's *The Work of Mourning*, a collection of texts on the deaths of friends and contemporaries from Roland Barthes to Jean-Francois Lyotard, takes a similar route from mourning to ethicality and friendship. In this way, *The Work of Mourning* tells us as much about a group of philosophers as a community as it does about their thought.

To return to Critchley's account of the relationship of philosophy and biography, his references to Socrates and Diogenes Laertius anticipate his more recent work *The Book of Dead Philosophers*, in which Critchley cites Socrates' statement in the *Phaedo* that 'true philosophers make dying their

profession', and evokes Diogenes Laertius as the main model for his own project as a whole. Critchley introduces Diogenes in one of the book's opening essays ('Writing about dead philosophers'), by rehearsing the usual argument about his unreliability as a source. He then comments on Diogenes the poet: 'It is also true that he peppered his book with the most awful verses, as we will see'.²¹ Critchley sides with Diogenes, especially in the relish he has in recounting the 'scandalous' facts of philosophical death, but more often than not, when Critchley refers to Diogenes it is to quote from and generally abuse his poetic output.²² Like Diogenes, Critchley begins his treatment of philosophers' deaths with Thales:

Thales died at an advanced age of heat, thirst and weakness while watching an athletic contest. This inspired Diogenes Laertius to the following execrable verse:

*As Thales watched the games one festal day
The fierce sun smote him and he passed away.*²³

Next, in the case of Pythagoras, Critchley again quotes from what he calls 'possibly the worst of [Diogenes'] verses', while he dubs Diogenes' lines on Ariston of Chios as 'the worst of his terrible verses'.²⁴ The last reference to Diogenes, albeit not to his poetry, occurs in Critchley's chapter on Epicurus:

What is most surprising in Diogenes Laertius' ten books of turgid reportage is the strength and length of his defence of Epicurus. 'These people are stark mad', Diogenes says to Epicurus' accusers, and he gets the longest and most detailed treatment of any philosopher in *Lives*, running to 154 pages.²⁵

Critchley's comment hints at a possible camaraderie that he feels with Diogenes, beyond their shared focus on deaths as biographies, as earlier in the work he acknowledges his own preference for a philosophy of death as markedly Epicurean:

My own view of death is closer to Epicurus and what is known as the four-part cure: don't fear God, don't worry about death, what is good is easy to get and what is terrible is easy to endure. He writes in the final of the four extant letters attributed to him,

Get used to believing that death is nothing to us. For all good and bad consists in sense-experience, and death is the privation of sense-experience.

Hence correct knowledge of the fact of death makes the mortality of life a matter for contentment, not by adding a limitless time to life but by removing the longing for immortality.²⁶

One way in which Critchley practises what he preaches in claiming an affiliation with Epicureanism is by actively promoting laughter in the face of death. The slapstick humour of some of the deaths that he describes further marks the 'Laertian' nature of *The Book of Dead Philosophers*, as well as Critchley's work in general. For example, in his book *On Humour*, Critchley acknowledges that it is 'the flipside of an earlier book of mine, called *Very Little . . . Almost Nothing . . .* Although *Very Little . . .* is all about death and appears rather sombre, *On Humour* might appear less sombre. But appearances can be deceptive'.²⁷ The place of humour in *The Book of Dead Philosophers*, however, is marked from the outset:

For the history of philosophers' deaths is also a tale of weirdness, madness, suicide, murder, bad luck, pathos, bathos and some dark humour. You will die laughing, I promise.²⁸

Critchley follows this observation with a snapshot list of philosophers' deaths from Pythagoras to Derrida and his own teacher, Dominique Janicaud, with the following ancient Greek deaths culled from Diogenes:

Pythagoras allowed himself to be slaughtered rather than
cross a field of beans;
Heracleitus suffocated in cow dung;
Plato allegedly died of a lice infestation;
Aristotle is reported to have killed himself with aconite;
Empedocles plunged into Mount Etna in the hope of
becoming a god, but one of his bronze slippers was
spat out by the flames in confirmation of his mortality;
Diogenes died by holding his breath;
So did the great radical Zeno of Citium;
Zeno of Elea died heroically by biting a tyrant's ear until
he was stabbed to death.²⁹

Critchley's list offers a fitting taster for his book to come, and fully establishes the Laertian credentials of his project of death and philosophy. Yet, to look back once more to *Very*

Little . . . Almost Nothing, we must ask what has happened to literature, which in this earlier book was part of Critchley's discussion of death and philosophy? We have already seen how Critchley shares the general consensus in dismissing Diogenes' literary credentials, especially when it comes to his poetic efforts. Yet what would it mean to produce a Laertian project that did justice to his literary, as well as biographical and philosophical, pretensions?

An answer may be found in the experimental fiction of the American novelist David Markson. In a series of works, nicknamed the 'Notecard Quartet' (*Reader's Block*, *This Is Not A Novel*, *Vanishing Point* and *The Last Novel*), Markson created a unique style of composition, woven out of the barest of narratives amid a mosaic of biographical anecdotes about and quotations on or by numerous writers, philosophers, artists, musicians and other creative individuals. Consider the following representative passage from *This Is Not A Novel*:

Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of
Askelon.
George Santayana, reading *Moby Dick*:
In spite of much skipping, I have got stuck in the middle.
Thales of Miletus died at his seat while watching an
athletic contest.
But I knew that Monsieur Beyle quite well, and you will
never convince me that a trifler like him could have
written masterpieces.
Said Sainte-Beuve.
Actionless, Writer wants it.
Which is to say, with no *sequence of events*.
Which is to say, with no indicated *passage of time*.
Then again, getting somewhere in spite of this.
The old wives' tale, repeated by Socrates, that Thales was
also frequently so preoccupied with gazing up at the
stars that he once stumbled into a well.
And was even laughed at by washerwomen.³⁰

Here we find the amazing range of collaged texts that comprise Markson's fiction: unattributed quotations, writers' comments on their reading, and notices of deaths as well as asides

that characterise the genre of the present writing. Yet if we focus on the two Thales references, we can appreciate the apparent paradox of still getting somewhere in spite of an actionless plot, with no sequence of events nor passage of time. As the anecdote of star-gazing Thales and the well comes after the account of his death at the stadium, Markson's 'also' intimates that this is the second story about Thales.³¹

The reason that I introduce Markson into the equation is to show that, while Critchley's *The Book of Dead Philosophers* is more explicit in its pretensions and aspirations to be a Laertian project, Markson's creative engagement with the death-story as biographical anecdote and as the basis for his own project can offer a helpful parallel to how we can understand the role of Diogenes' poetic contributions. As we shall see, Diogenes' poems on the deaths of philosophers can be understood as directly highlighting the nature of his whole project, and as creating a philosophical community, with a potentially Epicurean sense of comic mourning.

I can't go on, I'll go on: Epicurean mourning

Unlike Critchley's self-confessed Epicurean attitude towards death, we get no such statement in Diogenes, and it is perhaps impossible to be certain that our philosophical biographer was a card-carrying Epicurean.³² There are some tantalizing hints, such as the culmination of his work with the life and works of Epicurus, his characterization of his unnamed addressee as a 'lover of Plato' and the defence of Epicurus that is also mentioned by Critchley (D.L. 10.9).³³ One of the main reasons that scholars have denied either Diogenes' Epicureanism or affiliation to any philosophical school or position is the expansive nature of his work arising from its generally non-partisan approach.³⁴ However, for the present task of reconsidering Diogenes' death-poems, especially along with Critchley's questions of death and ethics, humour and mourning, it is worth briefly re-opening the debate on whether there is a specifically Epicurean perspective detectable (vel sim.) in Diogenes' work.³⁵

Diogenes' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* ends with the sequence of *sententiae* of Epicurus – his *Kuriai Doxai* – the very last one (KD 40) of which runs as follows (D.L. 10.154):

ὅσοι τὴν δύνανμιν ἔσχον τοῦ τὸ θαρρεῖν μάλιστα ἐκ τῶν ὁμορουντων παρασκευάσασθαι, οὕτω καὶ ἐβίωσαν μετ' ἀλλήλων ἥδιστα τὸ βεβαιότατον πίστωμα ἔχοντες, καὶ πληρεστάτην οἰκειότητα ἀπολαβόντες οὐκ ὠδύραντο ὥς πρὸς ἔλεον τὴν τοῦ τελευτήσαντος προκαταστροφὴν.³⁶

Those who have been able to achieve the greatest safety from the troubles around them have also lived together most happily with the most solid grounds for confidence in one another, and enjoying the fullest sense of friendship they did not mourn it as pitiable when others died before them.

The lack of mourning in Epicureanism is also a focus of Lucretius' extended treatment of death and dying at the end of Book 3 of *De rerum natura*. Amid his riposte to the idea of death as deprivation, Lucretius introduces the character of the mourner who at least acknowledges that death brings relief from suffering (*DRN* 3.906).³⁷ That said, Lucretius points out the ridiculousness of 'perpetual mourning' when death is just a sleep and rest and neither of those is bitter (*DRN* 3.909–11).³⁸ Kenney evokes the figure of the 'good Epicurean' here and we can see the correlation between Lucretius and the final Epicurus text quoted by Diogenes. Yet in both instances, Epicurus and Lucretius do not attack mourning as such, only insofar as grief has a basis in the belief that death is an evil.³⁹ It is precisely this nuanced conception of Epicurean mourning that I would claim is at the heart of Diogenes' biographical death-poetry – but with an important twist. The biographer of philosophers reworks his subjects' deaths into works of mourning that not only betray elements of personal grief while expounding general philosophical positions, but also, in doing so, take the time to literally mock death. Lodged between grief and humour, Diogenes' poetry offers the ideal opportunity for the exposition of the Epicurean philosopher's life and thought. In this way, it is worth asking: can it be possible that Diogenes transforms all philosophers' deaths into moments of Epicurean reflection specifically through his use of humour?

The idea of Epicurean laughter at death is well attested, especially in cases where laughter is directed towards the mythological bogeymen of Hades. In a fragmentary, epistolary text in the monumental second century CE inscription of the Epicurean Diogenes of Oenoanda, the deceased seems to be addressing someone (Epicurus?), to thank them for teaching him to laugh at ‘the Tityuses and Tantaluses that some depict in Hades’.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, there are Epicurean arguments about mourning and death that attempt to finesse the end with a sense of creative elongation of life, which, like the very end of Diogenes’ work and his Epicurean texts, evokes less humour than a sense of literary play. For example, David Armstrong has discussed several passages in Philodemus’ *On Death* in which we find arguments not elsewhere attested in the Epicurean corpus. One such argument is that ‘being wise entails the firm and permanent contemplation of death as part of life’.⁴¹ One way in which Philodemus evokes this contemplation is in the playful and witty way in which he concludes the fourth book of *On Death*, namely with what Armstrong calls ‘a daring, self-referential Hellenistic joke’.⁴² The pun on the final ‘paragraph’ (παραγραφή) of the book and the ‘limit’ of one’s life prompts Armstrong to imagine:

Philodemus holding up his manuscript smiling and pointing, to the blank at the bottom of the page, the symbol of the blankness of death.⁴³

Armstrong offers several parallels to this playful gesture of connecting the end of a literary work and the end of life, from death as the ‘final line’ (*ultima linea*) in Horace *Epistles* 1.16 to the punning of *clausulae* of life in Seneca’s *Epistulae Morales* (*Ep.* 66.48; 70.20). Armstrong also cites an epigram of Philodemus (*AP* 11.41) that makes a comparable gesture by referencing not only the years of his life as ‘pages’ (σελίδες), but also the *coronis* of his book and his love-madness (κορώνιδα . . . μανίης).

We can compare such playful closural devices in Diogenes Laertius’ last, Epicurean book. There are not only the last words of the last of the *Kuriai Doxai* which refers to ‘the premature death of departed friends’ (τὴν τοῦ τελευτήσαντος προκαταστροφήν), but also the following passage that introduces the *Kuriai Doxai* (D.L. 10.138)

Imagination dead imagine: Diogenes Laertius

καὶ φέρε οὖν δὴ νῦν τὸν κολοφῶνα, ὡς ἂν εἴποι τις, ἐπιθῶμεν καὶ τοῦ παντὸς συγγράμματος καὶ τοῦ βίου τοῦ φιλοσόφου, τὰς Κυρίας αὐτοῦ δόξας παραθέμενοι καὶ ταύταις τὸ πᾶν σύγγραμμα κατακλείσαντες, τέλει χρησάμενοι τῇ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας ἀρχῇ.

Come, then, let me set the colophon, so to say, both on my entire work and on the life of this philosopher by transmitting his *Principal Doctrines*, therewith bringing the whole work to a close and making the end of it the beginning of happiness.

Diogenes sets the *colophon* to his work as well as to the life of the philosopher/Epicurus, punning on the close of the work as marking the moral aim (*telos*) of happiness. In fact, for a comparable play on the end of life, we can look to the epigram devoted to Epicurus' death itself, which is followed by the solemn summary: 'this was the end of the life and the man' (οὗτος μὲν ὁ βίος τ' ἀνδρός, ἧδε <δέ> ἡ τελευτή, 10.16). The poem itself establishes this tension between death and living, the moment and means of the philosopher's death and the memorialization of his ideas (10.16):

χαίρετε, καὶ μέμνησθε τὰ δόγματα· τοῦτ' Ἐπίκουρος
ῥύστατον εἶπε φίλοις τοῦπος ἀποφθίμενος·
θερμὴν δὲ πύελον γὰρ ἐληλύθειεν καὶ ἄκρατον
ἔσπασεν, εἴτ' Ἀΐδην ψυχρὸν ἐπεσπάσατο.⁴⁴

Goodbye, and remember my doctrines. So Epicurus,
dying, spoke his final words to his friends.
He sat in a warm bath and drank in unmixed wine
and cold Hades in the same swig.

Diogenes imagines Epicurus telling his friends to remember his *dogmata* as memory and extinction are joined together in Epicurus' last breath. An added nuance to the final words is made by Diogenes by, on the one hand, the contrast between the 'warm bath' and 'cold Hades', but on the other hand, the conflation of the drinking of both the means of death (the 'unmixed wine') and death itself ('cold Hades'). However, as we will see, when compared to other biographical death-poems, what is most striking here is the first line as a quotation of Epicurus' last words. While Diogenes will elsewhere address the dying philosopher or

call on the gods on his behalf, here we have the dying philosopher speak. Diogenes' poem, therefore, acts as both a playful recollection and a memorial to Epicurus' words as *dogmata*, just as his own tenth book will preserve his philosophy.

It is precisely this playfulness that I want to consider in some of Diogenes' biographical death-poems of non-Epicurean philosophers, and in doing so I also wish to explore the possibility that his way of approaching death with humour might be understood as part of an Epicurean program.

Diogenes on dying laughing

There is still considerable work to be done on Diogenes' poems about philosophers' deaths. Several studies have made a start at cataloguing and ordering Diogenes' death-narratives, but not the poems about death specifically.⁴⁵ Rather than survey the range of his poetic death-stories, with his poem on Epicurus in mind, I want to limit myself to four poems in which Diogenes directly references his poetic endeavour as particularly humorous or playful. I will briefly outline the philosophical basis for the humour and then consider the specific role of the description of the death itself as the centre of that humour. Then I will consider the markedly Epicurean focus on how Diogenes' poetic mockery of philosophers' deaths is a mockery of attitudes towards death itself.

Diogenes uses the same term to introduce two death-poems in which he states 'we satirized' (προσεπαιξάμεν) two curious philosophers: Ariston of Chios (7.164) and Lacydes of Cyrene (4.61). Let us first consider them together:

τοῦτον λόγος φαλακρόν ὄντα ἐγκαυθῆναι ὑπὸ ἡλίου καὶ ὦδε τελευτῆσαι. προσε-
παιξάμεν δ' αὐτῷ τόνδε τὸν τρόπον τῷ ἰάμβῳ τῷ χωλῷ:

τί δὴ γέρων ὦν καὶ φάλανθος, ὦρίστων,
τὸ βρέγμ' ἔδωκας ἡλίῳ κατοπτῆσαι;
τοιγάρ τὸ θερμόν πλεῖον ἢ δέοι ζητῶν
τὸν ψυχρόν ὄντως εὖρες οὐ θέλων "Αἰδην.⁴⁶
Ariston of Chios 7.164

Imagination dead imagine: Diogenes Laertius

The story goes that, as he was bald, he got sun-stroke, and so died. We satirized him in choliambic verse as follows:

Why, when you are so old and bald, O Ariston,
did you let the sun roast your forehead?
Thus for seeking more warmth than you needed,
you unwittingly found cold Hades.

ἡ τελευτὴ δὲ αὐτῷ παράλυσις ἐκ πολυποσίας. καὶ αὐτῷ προσεπαίξαμεν ἡμεῖς
οὕτωςί:

καὶ σέο, Λακύδη, φάτιν ἔκλυον ὥς ἄρα καὶ σέ
Βάκχος ἐλὼν Ἀΐδῃ ποσσὶν ἔσυρεν ἄκροις.
ἡ σαφὲς ἦν, Διόνυσος ὅταν πολὺς ἐς δέμας ἔλθῃ,
λῦσε μέλη: διὸ δὴ μήτι Λυσῆος ἔφυ;
Lacydes of Cyrene 4.61

His death was from paralysis caused by hard-drinking. And we satirized him in verse as follows:

And about you too, Lacydes, I heard how Bacchus
snatched you
and dragged you by your toes to Hades.
Surely it was clear that when Dionysus enters the body
with force,
he loosens the limbs. Is that not why he's called the
Loosener?

The Academic Lacydes dies of excessive drinking and the Stoic Ariston of sun-stroke.

As with all of Diogenes' death-poems, a certain element of humour is generated through the juxtaposition of these philosophers' ideas in relation to their deaths. It is Ariston's 'indifference' to the sun that kills him, and Lacydes' death is by wine, the storage of which was at the heart of the story of his turn to sceptical *akatalēpsia*.⁴⁷ Ariston 'the Bald', as Diogenes comments at the opening to his short biography, was an odd Stoic, who considered the *telos* of life to be indifference. Given this, the philosophical grounds for the joke is two-fold: on the one hand, Mr. Indifferent ignores the sun's heat and gets burnt, on the other hand, he seeks after warmth, thus undermining his pursuit of indifference (or his indifference of pursuit). In a more generic sense, the comic element in this poem

may be due to Ariston's baldness, which connects him to other figures of fun (e.g. Aeschylus, whose baldness also was to blame for his death).⁴⁸

Yet in both cases a contrast is made between an idiomatic phrase and the philosopher's particular fate. The humour of Ariston's death by the sun is compounded by his search for warmth leaving him in 'cold Hades' (ψυχρὸν Ἄϊδην). For Lacydes, his own drunkenness and the 'limb-loosening' power of Dionysus become parallels for death. Now if we return to Diogenes' poem on Epicurus' death, we find the same contrast is made between heat and cold, the warm bath and 'cold Hades' (Ἄϊδην ψυχρὸν, 10. 16), and the same connection seeking warmth (through drinking) wine and finding death (i.e. dying).⁴⁹ The contrast in heat and cold for Ariston and the drinking of wine and death for Lacydes both contain elements that Diogenes includes in his epitaph to Epicurus. What do the correspondences between the comic deaths of Ariston and Lacydes and the exemplary death of Epicurus tell us? On the one hand, we can conclude that the ironic element is not lacking in Diogenes' take on Epicurus' death.⁵⁰ However, another option is to understand satires on the deaths of philosophers as satire directed not against the philosophers but against death itself. The description of Hades as cold flies in the face of the Epicurean concept of death as 'deprivation of sense experience', a concept described in the *Letter to Menoeceus* (D.L. 10.124). As for the reference to Dionysus as the 'Loosener', it can be understood in terms of Epicurean ideal of *ataraxia* as a releasing from cares at death. For example, Lucretius comments how 'the terrors of death/leave the breast empty and released from cares' (*mortisque timores / tum vacuum pectus linquunt curaque solutum* (DRN 2.45–6)). Therefore, in both of these ways, these poems on the deaths of Ariston and Lacydes are readable as texts of Epicurean mourning.

These are the only two death-poems introduced individually by a reference to Diogenes' comic intent. However, Diogenes describes a sequence of poems about Pythagoras, one of which is about 'how he died' (ὥς ἐτελεύτα), and two poems about Empedocles' death, as playful (πεπαιγμένα). The two

Empedocles poems (D.L. 10.44–5) rework different death stories, the first referring to the Etnaeian leap, the second the fall from a chariot, although the presence of a tomb must undermine the Etna story (and vice versa). In both we can see the image of drinking in death that we met in the Lacydes and Epicurus epigrams. However, the Pythagoras death-poem adds a different twist (8.45):

αἶ, αἶ, Πυθαγόρης τί τόσον κυάμους ἐσεβάσθη;
καὶ θάνε φοιτηταῖς ἄμμιγα τοῖς ἰδίοις.
χωρίον ἦν κυάμων· ἵνα μὴ τούτους δὲ πατήσῃ,
ἐξ Ἀκραγαντίνων κάτθαν' ἐνὶ τριόδῳ.

Ai ai, why so much honour from Pythagoras towards
beans?
And so he died this way, among his most close
companions.
There was a field of beans; to avoid trampling them
he died at the crossroad of Agrigentum.

Critchley dubs this ‘possibly the worst of his verses’, but I am not interested here in debating the poetic merits of Diogenes.⁵¹ Beyond this type of judgement, what does the poem tell us? First we have the traditional interjection of mourning (αἶ, αἶ) directed towards the dead philosopher.⁵² This is also, at one and the same time, a joke about the black marks supposedly inscribed on the bean-flower ‘Ai Ai’, like those also found in the hyacinth, who had a more famous story of reincarnation attached to it, that of Narcissus.⁵³ The pun not only answers the question it poses, but also inscribes the satire of Pythagorean philosophy onto the work of mourning. What of the beans themselves? There were numerous traditions associating beans with death.⁵⁴ What is interesting is another metaphor on the ‘crossing’ of the field as a metaphorical renouncing of his doctrines. In the prose account (D.L. 8.39), Diogenes retells Hermippus’ tale of Pythagoras saying he would be more willing to die than to cross the bean-field; to be killed than to prate on about his doctrines.

The focus on Pythagoras’ followers being present at his death adds an element to the poem that could give an

Epicurean basis for Diogenes' playful poem. His *Life of Epicurus* describes how Epicurus stayed in Athens most of his life, in spite of the 'calamities that befell her at that time' (D.L. 10.10). This has been interpreted as a reference to the story of Epicurus sustaining his followers with beans during the siege of Athens by Demetrius in 298/7 BCE, which is told by Plutarch in his *Life of Demetrius* (34):

τότε καὶ τὸν φιλόσοφον Ἐπίκουρον ἱστοροῦσι διαθρέψαι τοὺς συνήθεις κυάμους πρὸς ἀριθμὸν μετ' αὐτῶν διανεμόμενον.

At this time also, we are told, the philosopher Epicurus sustained the lives of his associates with beans, which he counted out and distributed among them.

Now we cannot be sure that Diogenes had the two bean stories in his mind, but if he did it would explain the reference to Pythagoras' companions in his poem. One philosopher confronted with a field of beans abandons his followers (to maintain his beliefs), while the other sustains his followers with a handful of beans (to maintain his beliefs). As with the poems on Ariston, Lacydes and Empedocles, if we read the Pythagoras poem alongside the one on Epicurus, a sharp contrast emerges between the latter's address to his friends and the former's role in their own deaths. Each of these is grounded in the idea of a philosopher's doctrines being remembered, naturally with divergent results.

In spite of the Epicurean resonances in these comic death-poems, whether in their basic framework or in their variations on the poem Diogenes composed for Epicurus, there is a more fundamental affinity that is being affirmed here. In both poems, Diogenes positions himself as a mourner of these philosophers' deaths. He addresses them all by name and, in the case of Pythagoras, laments the death. It is through the comic and creative act of composing the poems that Diogenes establishes a philosophical community. In this way, Diogenes offers a collective portrait of philosophy as the process of thinking beyond death. Beyond Epicurean affiliation, the philosophical way of death is something that Diogenes celebrates, with a smile, and in a way that engages and reanimates these philosophers' doctrines at the same time, as Steve McQueen's *Deadpan*

reactivates both Beckett's *Film* and Buster Keaton's iconic comedic performances and Simon Critchley and David Markson each create their own Laertian projects.

To return to Barthes' mourning diary, this is Diogenes Laertius' work of mourning which is constantly and playfully promoting that same 'sense of life' that makes death bearable. Diogenes Laertius, the biographer and thanatographer of philosophers, writes his comic poetry of death to make these philosophers live on and on.⁵⁵

Notes

- 1 Barthes (2010) 80. It was Barthes and his *biographeme* that first introduced me to the significance of biography between literature and philosophy. For helping me understand how Barthes' *biographeme* signifies the relationship of writing to biography, of biography to institution, of reading to social context, of semiosis and mimesis, I thank William Batstone (then as now). This chapter was written in memorial of the work of the comic genius of the death-anecdote, David Markson (1927–2010), and in the presence of the living, singular work of Dani Leventhal.
- 2 Derrida (2003) 52.
- 3 1.39. On Diogenes' poetry in general, see Mejer (1978) 47–50; Gigante (1986) 34–44; Bollansée (1999) 227–32.
- 4 Mejer (1978) 32, n. 67; Bollansée (1999) 228.
- 5 Verdicts range from 'flat' (Mejer (1978) 49) to 'frightful' (Barnes (1986) 22 seem to conflate form and content). As we will see, Critchley (2008) hams up his criticism of them as 'awful', 'terrible' and 'the worst'. As Warren (2007) 138, n. 20 notes, perhaps Diogenes' comment at D.L. 4.15 (Xenocrates) anticipated such criticism by defending the prose-writing poet, as opposed to the trouble facing the poet-writing prose author, differentiating between poetry as a work of nature and prose as a work of art. Barnes (1986) 22 summarizes Nietzsche's position as follows: 'Diogenes was a poet; he wanted his poems to be preserved for posterity; and he constructed the *Lives* as a vehicle to carry a selection of his epigrams'.
- 6 Porter (2002) 329, n. 89. On Nietzsche and Diogenes in general, see Barnes (1986).
- 7 Chitwood (2004).
- 8 Mejer (1978) 48–9.
- 9 Tarán (1979) 132; Day (2007) 31.

- 10 E.g. *AP* 6.44 (Ion of Chios) and *AP* 6.51 (Adaeus) on the death of Euripides; *AP* 7.76 on Philocritus (Dioscorides); *AP* 7.127 on Alcimenes (Antipater).
- 11 Mejer (1978) 49.
- 12 Oppo (2008) 215. On Beckett and death, see Ricks (1996) and Barfield, Feldman and Tew (2011).
- 13 Critchley (2007) 110.
- 14 Lamont (2002) 133.
- 15 Lamont (1987) 66.
- 16 McQueen has been quoted as wishing that Beckett could have written the screenplay to his later film *Hunger*. We find an afterlife for McQueen's *Deadpan* in a drawing by contemporary artist, Dani Leventhal, called *Sammy with McQueen*, 2013, which I have had gracing my office throughout the writing of this chapter.
- 17 Critchley (2010) 1.
- 18 Critchley (1997) 2.
- 19 Critchley (1999). On the contexts for this book, see Critchley (2010) 40. The Derridean concept of the 'work of mourning', as explored in Derrida (2003), is not universally embraced when discussing works of mourning. See e.g. Jones (2009) 95 commenting on Robert Frank's 1996 video-film *The Present*:
- If you've seen *The Present*, you will know that it is, in one sense, a lament. I won't call it a work of mourning, because that would be to tag it with a bullshit, precision-tolled cliché. But Frank's son Pablo, dead before his father started making this video (a photo on a gallery wall, glimpsed in one of *The Present*'s many fragments: Frank's son, framed by the words 'Pablo . . . Gone' and followed by a country song on the track – 'Well, goodbye, Mr. Reporter, I'm sorry for what I done'), keeps coming back.
- 20 Critchley (1999) 14.
- 21 Critchley (2008) xxxiii.
- 22 Critchley refers to Diogenes for other reasons beyond his poetry, e.g. for his discussions of Empedocles' clothes, Aristotle's will and Diogenes' works.
- 23 Critchley (2008) 4. Note that the poem is only the first two lines and is in the verse-translation of Hicks. The description of Thales' death is also a word-for-word rephrase of Hicks: 'Thales the Sage died as he was watching an athletic contest from heat, thirst and the weakness incident to advanced age' (Hicks (1925) 41).
- 24 Critchley (2008) 9, 35.
- 25 Critchley (2008) 37–8. Pages of the Loeb, Hicks (1925), that is.
- 26 Critchley (2008) xxx. Epicurus *Letter to Menoeceus* (D.L. 10.124).

- 27 Critchley (2002) 126.
- 28 Critchley (2008) xxvi.
- 29 Critchley (2008) xxvi–xxvii.
- 30 Markson (2001) 3.
- 31 Unless of course, the ‘also’ is meant to mark an affinity between Thales and Socrates here. This is perhaps the fitting place to record an anecdote of my own. I had called Markson to ask if he would be interested in being part of the original Cambridge conference, but sadly his poor health kept him from travelling outside Brooklyn. When I heard of his death in June 2010, and the much-discussed event of his library being gifted to the Strand bookstore in New York, I was in Spain. Nonetheless, I ordered two copies of Jowett’s Plato from the store, which waited for me in my office back in Columbus. The first was a disappointment, but underneath the price-sticker of the second, there was Markson’s name. I flipped straight to the end of the *Phaedo* and there I found the last lines – used in *This Is Not a Novel* – underlined.
- 32 Barnes (1986) follows Nietzsche in preferring to transpose any Epicurean affiliation to Diogenes’ source, Diocles of Magnesia. For a corrective view, see Porter (2002) 329, n. 90.
- 33 Warren (2007) and Fletcher (2012) 84–7.
- 34 Philodemus’ account of the Academy offers a convenient parallel for a non-partisan Epicurean biography of another philosophical school, on which see Gaiser (1988) and Dorandi (1991).
- 35 This is not the place to rehearse the general attitude of Epicurus and Epicureans towards death, on which see the substantial study of Warren (2004), as well as more recently Mitsis (2012).
- 36 All Greek text is from Dorandi (2013); all translations are my own.
- 37 See Segal (1990) 69–70 and Warren (2004) 38.
- 38 Wallach (1976) 53–4, with Kenney (1977) 208.
- 39 Warren (2007) 40 points to how grief is an acceptable emotion for Epicureans, as not showing grief would be worse, as it would mean someone is ‘without emotion’ (*apathēs*).
- 40 Fr. 73 = Ch. fr. 14. See Gordon (1996) 29, 103.
- 41 Armstrong (2004) 35.
- 42 Armstrong (2004) 51.
- 43 Armstrong (2004) 52. On such moments that evoke the ‘matter of the page’, see Butler (2011).
- 44 *AP* 7.106.
- 45 Jerphagnon (1981); Grau (2010).
- 46 *AP* 5.38.
- 47 On Ariston’s ‘indifference’, see Porter (1996); on Lacydes’ turn to scepticism, see Hankinson (2002) 84–6, which is based on the

story of his ingenious plan to lock his storehouse door, but which his slaves discovered, copied and thus, stole (wine?) from him.

48 Grau (2010) 350, who refers to Lefkowitz (2009b).

49 The poem (AP 7.105) actually comes after the epigram on Lacydes in the *Greek Anthology* (AP 7.104).

50 Grau (2010) 361, 368.

51 Critchley (2008) 9.

52 On this and other words of Greek mourning, see Loraux (2002).

53 Bertholet (1909) 43.

54 Simoons (1998).

55 For a fittingly comic afterlife for Diogenes Laertius' project, see Fischer (1994).

PART V

PORTRAITS OF THE ARTIST

CHAPTER 11

‘IT IS ORPHEUS WHEN THERE IS SINGING’: THE MYTHICAL FABRIC OF MUSICAL LIVES

PAULINE A. LEVEN

He was given his lyre when he was still a child, barely taller than the frame. Calliope, steadying him, showed him how to chant like her as he played. All his poet’s art, and much of his mystic wisdom, was apparently learned from her.

This fragment makes for an intriguing addition to our collection of ancient lives. The vignette of the child prodigy, learning his art from a goddess in a form of epiphany, satisfies our craving for an account of the early discovery of talent and for the divine sanctioning of genius, in the type of tale developed, for example, in Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists* and explored by Kris and Kurz.¹ Yet the quotation does not come from any ancient or Renaissance account: the musician of the epigraph is Orpheus, and the work from which it is taken is Ann Wroe’s *Orpheus: The Song of Life* (2011).² A suggestive addition to the thousands of artistic objects inspired by the figure of Orpheus, Ann Wroe’s book is a modern work of creative supplementation that takes the form of a biography of the musical hero, embedded in imagined moments of the life of Rainer Maria Rilke, as he was trying to finish a ‘great symphony of poetry, his *Duino Elegies*’.³ Soon the figure of Rilke disappears, and seven chapters mapped onto the seven strings of Orpheus’ kithara describe important moments of the musician’s life: his origins and the early signs of his musical nature, his training, his Argonautic adventures, priestly activities, marriage, travel to the Underworld and death. We hear about his sandals and Thracian coat, his priestly robes and proud demeanour, the golden strap of his lyre, the tone of his voice – high, sweet and clear – and the colour of his eyes – slate grey (or perhaps, entranced by the book’s lyricism, I imagined that

last detail?). Like the operas, novels, sculptures, poems and paintings celebrating Orpheus, the book is a meditation on the nature, power and meaning of art and on the processes of creation and performance. More specifically, the subtitle of Wroe's book (*The Song of Life*) engages directly with the project of the current volume. It plays on the continuity between creative life and creation (song) and blurs the distinction between an individual existence (the song of *a* life) and the collective experience of existing as human beings (the song of Life). 'Song of Life' also hints simultaneously at a product and an activity, an object and a subject: it erases the lines separating a work enduring in time, like a written text or a statue, with their material status independent from their maker, and a doing, with its ephemeral nature and its fragile embodiment in a live person in performance. Finally, in its ambiguity (we are told neither whose song nor whose life it is), it reshapes the boundaries between art and artist and encapsulates the general theme that my chapter explores: the specific character of the lives of ancient musicians and the challenges and opportunities offered by writing, and reading, a 'musical life'. But before I turn to the heart of my argument, a set of challenges brought up by these very terms needs to be considered.

Challenges of 'song' and 'life'

Song, music and mousikē

The choice of words in Wroe's subtitle is significant. 'Song' is much more in tune with ancient realities than 'music' would be, as 'music' and 'musician' cover spheres of experience, society and value that are different from the ancient terms *mousikē* and *mousikos*.⁴ As Kathleen Higgins explains in a volume whose title, *The Music of Our Lives*, relies on terms that are also central to this chapter, few modern works devoted to music actually give a definition of what music is. When they do, important elements of definition include intentional tone production, expression, emotion, art and science. Most uses of the term 'music', at least as understood in the modern West, revolve around the idea of an authored work, written down

and acknowledged as ‘music’ regardless of whether it is performed or even sounded out.⁵ Within this broad modern category, a further distinction appears: ‘music in itself’, even ‘pure music’, ‘absolute music’ is instrumental music, without words – a focus that is not operative for many cultures, least of all for the Greeks, and one that only came into being as an idea (with high stakes and polarizing debates attached to it) in the middle of the nineteenth century.⁶ As for ‘musician’, the term today designates trained individuals, professionals and amateurs, who ‘read music’ and specialize in the production or performance (rarely both) of one (rarely more) type of instrumental or vocal music. But it does not include, for example, poets, dancers or actors, nor listeners of any type of music who do not have an ability to read or produce it.⁷ This delineating of the provinces of ‘music’, ‘poetry’, ‘drama’ and ‘dance’ is, in major part, a result of the classification of the system of the ‘fine arts’ in the eighteenth century, also discussed by Verity Platt in the [next chapter](#). The distinction between ‘poet’ and ‘musician’ in particular can be traced back to the medieval period: the fourteenth-century French composer Guillaume de Machaut marks a watershed in the history of Western music, as he is, in David Leech-Wilkinson’s words, the ‘last poet who was also a composer’. After that period, and until the twentieth-century phenomenon of singers-songwriters (what the Italians call *cantautori*⁸), one did not tend to include lyric poets (nor, for that matter, actors, dancers and choreographers) among ‘musicians’, and vice versa: while all are sensitive to rhythm, movement, and harmony, they are involved in different arts.⁹

For the Greeks, however, *mousikē* and the cognate adjective *mousikos* were triply more open than their modern equivalents. First, as Penelope Murray and Peter Wilson explain in their landmark volume *Music and the Muses*, ‘in its commonest form, *mousikē* represented for the Greeks a seamless complex of instrumental music, poetic word and co-ordinated physical movement’.¹⁰ Covering a much broader range of practice and perceptions than our ‘music’, *mousikē* also has a sociology much more inclusive than its modern counterpart: instead of

being the preserve of an elite, *mousikē* included not only the professional composers, theorists, instrumentalists, vocalists and dancers, but also the thousands of citizens singing and dancing in choruses and the whole community celebrating every single important event of life through music, song and dance – thus producing, listening to and appreciating music in many different guises, with or without a knowledge of the rules and principles of organization of sounds, divisions of the tetrachords or debates about acceptable *harmoniai*, and with rare recourse to the medium of a written score.¹¹ Second, rather than being defined in relationship with a product, or even a technical skill, *mousikē* is, more generally, understood as the collective domain of the Muses: in this large sense, *mousikē* finds its closest equivalent in our term ‘culture’ and cultivation of the mind.¹² The adjective *mousikos* is used ‘of people who are not professional musicians, but are people of refined culture, well-educated devotees of *mousikē* in its broadest sense’.¹³ Finally, this centrality of music, song and dance in social, religious, intellectual and cultural life has even larger repercussions for the way we think about the Greeks’ experience of life itself.¹⁴ As Stephen Halliwell has analysed with much finesse, Greek *mousikē* is more than an ensemble of ‘artistic’ practices: it is a form of life-value. For Halliwell:

notions of *amousia* – itself hard to translate by any single term, but embracing various failures and/or refusals to cultivate the values of ‘music’ (*mousikē*) and the Muses – [can be treated] as a clue to certain Greek ways of thinking which have a special bearing on the problems of aesthetics.¹⁵

I will come back to that important idea shortly.

Biography, bios and life

The notion of *mousikē* as life-value, illustrative of the disjunction between ancient and modern meanings of ‘music’, brings up a related question, namely that of the poor fit between modern and ancient Greek meanings of *Life*. It is often observed that the ancient concept of *bios* does not neatly overlap with modern ideas of biography, neither in its

narrative form nor in its intellectual ambition.¹⁶ Yet there are several ways in which the life of people specializing in the production and performance of music was imagined, if not documented. Some pieces of ancient scholarship were essentially concerned with the prosopography of *mousikē*: in the late fifth century Hellanicus of Lesbos, for example, compiled a *Catalogue of Carnean Victors* and Glaucus of Rhegium wrote an *On Ancient Poets and Mousikoi* (Περὶ τῶν ἀρχαίων ποιητῶν τε καὶ μουσικῶν); the fourth-century Peripatetic scholar Heraclides of Pontus had a *Catalogue of Musicians* (Συναγωγή τῶν ἐν μουσικῇ) and the third-century Hieronymus of Rhodes authored an *On Citharodes* (the fifth book of his *On Poets*, fr. 33 Werhli). Not enough of any of these works has survived to give us a clear idea of their content, especially the kind of attention that they paid, if any, to individual traits of individual composers, but a central preoccupation was evidently to establish a relative chronology among composers, sometimes starting from a fixed point (the date of Archilochus in the case of Glaucus).¹⁷ The practice of cultural history started with the quest for *protoi heuretai* (first inventors/discoverers) and the history of *mousikē* was indistinguishable from a history of notorious practitioners and their inventions, as if an eternal *Mousikē* could be documented in its existence through different human bodies. Besides these general catalogues, some treatises were devoted to individual poet-musicians. Starting with Chamaeleon, works of the *Peri tou deina* form (*On so-and-so*) became a genre identified as such by Friedrich Leo.¹⁸ The treatises, however, were more forms of literary criticism on the poems than attempts to account for features of aural/oral matters and performance.

More generally, and as Clearchus' *Peri biōn* attests, the term *bios* itself designated as much the concept of life as an actual lived life of a historical character. Ancient *bioi* were more about types of lives than about individuals.¹⁹ One distinctive feature of this type of writing is the presence of 'biographical anecdotes': though an anecdote presents itself as a piece of information focused on one individual, the same anecdote might appear somewhere else, its subject another person, to

illustrate the same ethical point.²⁰ This form of writing is difficult to square with our modern ideas about personhood, subjectivity and individuality, but understanding ‘life’ as covering a larger province than the mere existence of an individual acquires particular weight in the case of the definition of *mousikos* as ‘having to do with the Muses’: as the debate in Euripides’ *Antiope* between the mythical brothers Amphion and Zethus confirms, being a *mousikos* is really about choosing a *bios*, a type of life, and asserting certain values in it, namely contemplation, quietism and cultivation of the mind.²¹ No phrase illustrates this better than Nietzsche’s remark that ‘a life without music would be a mistake’, a phrase that Halliwell deems deeply Greek in sentiment if not in origin.²² ‘Musical life’, which can for us designate the fairly circumscribed existence of a sound-artist, could thus have sounded like a tautology to an ancient Greek.

This enlarged definition of the confines of ‘musical’ and ‘life’ brings up a question of method: if the *mousikos anēr* is the man whose activity and interests comprise anything that has to do with memory, art and the mind, where do we draw the boundaries of that category? More pressingly perhaps, if *mousikē* is defined as encompassing poetry, music and movement, is there any value in distinguishing between poet and musician?²³ Finally, how can we properly account for the acoustic and kinetic element of *mousikē* in the reading of the life, given that these immaterial, sensual and ephemeral aspects are lost to us, and how can we rescue musical lives from being read from the only traces that have survived – words on a page? The musicians’ anecdotes present a related type of challenge to that of the artists’ anecdotes: while artists’ anecdotes are narratives of making and a handiwork product, musicians’ anecdotes are narratives of a doing, with a corresponding product that has strangely ossified (a text with no acoustic nor spatial dimension). These questions might make us think that the concept of ‘musical life’ is a modern mirage. But it is not quite so. The purpose of my discussion of the terms is not to suggest that we despair about finding an equivalent between ancient Greek realities and modern vocabulary, but rather that we

establish a productive dialogue between the two domains. The back-and-forth invites us to look for additional ways to account for aspects we are missing when we merely focus on the musical ‘work’.²⁴ In the pages that follow, I want to focus on a less studied aspect of the question and open the inquiry to consider the life of *mousikoi* as artists dealing with words *and* sounds, rhythms and performance and producing auditory pleasure thereby. By acknowledging the more sonorous, sensual and often less discursive aspects of these lives, my goal is to suggest an alternative way of reading, one that revolves less around the work (the preserved song or poem) or on the ethical dimension, and, following Halliwell’s reading, more on questions of aesthetics: I want to concentrate on passages that show how the beauty of music, the responses to the pleasure that it provides and the questions that surround its origins and nature shape the narrative of lives. This brings me to the figure of Orpheus, with whom I opened the chapter, and to the core of my argument.

Orpheus’ life

Ann Wroe’s book invites us to reflect further on an idea exposed by Kurz and Kris, namely the continuity between myth and *bios*-writing: ‘for historians have learned to recognize that the anecdote in its wider sense taps the realms of myth and saga, from which it carries a wealth of imaginative material into recorded history’.²⁵ For Kurz and Kris, ‘even in the histories of comparatively modern artists we find biographical themes that can be traced back, point by point, to the god- and hero-filled world before the dawn of history’. This is the groundwork for my argument: the Orpheus myth provides the ‘fundamental story’ for the biographical moments, or fragments of life, of historical musicians that I will discuss in the final part of the chapter.²⁶ I want to argue that the recurring motifs and pressing areas of debate that one finds in anecdotes about Terpander, Sappho, Pindar or Timotheus (motifs that can get adapted to specific historical circumstances) are all reconfigurations of the elements and problems one finds in

the imagined life of Orpheus. No formula better encapsulates this than Rilke's words: 'ist's Orpheus wenn es singt' ('it is Orpheus when there is singing', *Sonnets* V, 6). I do not mean to suggest that anecdotal episodes are 'derived' from Orpheus' life, as a copy would be derived from a model, or that all biographical anecdotes are conscious attempts to model historical musicians' lives onto the life of Orpheus, although they can sometimes be just that. Rather, I read them as similar forms of engagement with the aesthetic questions brought up by the myth.²⁷ Looking at the problem this way is thus different, in terms of methods and goals, from examining the sources of the fictionality of certain musicians' *bioi* and reading them as forms of literary criticism, or from interpreting stories about *mousikoi* as a form of cultural history or reception practice, as I have done in previous pieces.²⁸ Here, and as a prelude to a new project devoted to musical myths, I tackle the 'biography' of artists reworking the myth of Orpheus as always renewed forms of meditation on the myth and the aesthetic questions that accompany the figure of the musician, questions related to the phenomenology of performance, the essence of the listening experience and to the ontology of music.²⁹

Orpheus is the single most important figure for Greek conceptualizations of ideas on the nature of music, its power on the soul and the senses and its meaning in life.³⁰ Although our knowledge of the Orpheus myth is mostly fashioned by Roman narratives, Virgil's *Georgics* 4 and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (10.1–85 and 11.1–66), the myth existed from the seventh century BC and fragments of poetry and iconography give us an idea of the different forms it took.³¹ Charles Segal summarizes the most famous version as follows:

Eurydice, the bride of Orpheus, is fatally bitten by a snake; the singer, relying on the power of his art, descends to Hades to win her back, persuades the gods of the underworld to relinquish her, but loses her again when he disobeys their command not to look back. Renouncing women (and in one version turning to homosexual love), he is torn apart by a band of angry Maenads. The head and lyre, still singing, float down the Hebrus River to the island of Lesbos, where Apollo protects the head from a snake and endows it with prophetic power.³²

For Segal, the 'fundamental elements in the myth form a triangle: art, death, love. The meaning of the myth shifts as different points form the base: love-death, love-art, art-death'. Many other interpretations of the myth have been offered.³³ But what interests me particularly in Segal's analysis is the inextricable link he establishes between *technē*, emotions and nature: the life of Orpheus is a meditation on the power (or powerlessness) of music in the face of nature, *eros*, society, violence and other forces one encounters in a life. A short but rich article by Donatella Restani on how the myth is the projection of important ideas about music provides a good complement to Segal's reading.³⁴ Starting from the premise that the link between Orpheus' music and his death is fundamental, not the least for Plato's qualification of Orpheus and Thamyris as *mousikoi* reincarnated into birds in the moment of their choice of life (*Rep.* 10.620a), Restani examines different strands of mythical logic. For her, the thread that unites *mousikē*, death and fascination passes through the bonds that connect Orpheus to his enlarged family, to his musical instrument and to his initiatic voyage. Following both Segal and Restani, I suggest that the myth engages with four areas of aesthetic thinking.³⁵

The first concerns the origins of the musician, and by extension, the origins of musical practice. In most versions, the Thracian Oeagrus begets Orpheus,³⁶ but a few authors make Apollo his father, or teacher.³⁷ Most take Calliope (who also begat the Sirens and Linus) to be his mother; a few, Polyhymnia.³⁸ The different versions of Orpheus' parentage are not 'contradictions' as much as they reveal different types of strategy to pin onto another plane, divine or foreign, even barbarian or at least liminal, the nature of musical skill and the type of supernatural power of song, partly transcendent and potentially dangerous.³⁹ At the same time, this genealogy makes the transmission of musical knowledge a matter tightly controlled through family, and (if Apollo is not the father but the teacher) pedagogical ties.⁴⁰ The same logic operates in other myths that make Orpheus the father of Musaeus (or his teacher), the brother of Linus (or his student, or his teacher) and the teacher

of Amphion, Thamyras, Midas and Heracles.⁴¹ In these various snippets of mythical life, the didactic link (Apollo and a Muse teaching their son, or Orpheus teaching his own) doubles the biological one as a way to ensure continuity in the skill of *mousikē* and inspiration for song; a way of keeping music in the family, through DNA and closely monitored practice at home, and an alternative to an epiphanic visit of a divinity granting authorization to a boy (on the Hesiod or Archilochus model).⁴² It is a statement of the idea of what makes a *mousikos*, and of how *mousikē* is passed down through an unbroken thread, from unattainable regions (that of the gods or barbarians) down to the Greek here-and-now.

The second important area of conceptualization concerns the power of Orpheus' voice and music.⁴³ In the first surviving poetic fragments that retell the myth as well as in iconography, Orpheus is represented as surrounded by animals, birds, trees and rocks, all drawn by his song.⁴⁴ The myth speaks to the power of song to fascinate, delight and move souls: the beauty of Orpheus' music creates a restful state of contemplation in its audience, of animals and men.⁴⁵ The song acts as a compulsive force on senses and emotions, since non-speech endowed creatures are physically moved: in the process, boundaries are elided between men and animals, who all offer a 'mimetic' response, called to 'move' to the music.⁴⁶ Physical movement and internal emotion mirror each other. Orpheus' song can be seen as representing either the triumph of the creative force of man over nature, through enchanting man-made sounds, or man's return, through *mousikē*, to a lost harmony with nature, understood 'as the reservoir of vitality and energy, the echo chamber of whatever songs "are singing still"'.⁴⁷ This way of evoking the quieting power of song, and the bucolic fiction of a music that creates the harmony necessary for the wolf and the lamb to coexist in peaceful contemplation and for men and birds to understand the same language, finds a complement in the representation of the power of the song's rhetoric, which is central to the relationship between music and death.⁴⁸ It is the song's words, working in conjunction with its tune, that convince the bewitched lords of the Underworld to relinquish

Eurydice. Only a few (late) authors, including Ovid but not Virgil, give details about the words that persuaded Hades and Persephone, but artists later rivalled with Orpheus to imagine the verbal counterpart of the irresistible sensual attraction of Orpheus’ sounds.⁴⁹

A third major element of the myth is the tension it represents between *eros* and music. Both *eros* and songs are, in the Greek imagination, construed in a similar way, as relying on enchantment (*thelxis*) and delight (*terpsis*). The Sirens, for example, are imagined as a mix of sex-appeal, irresistible rhetoric and beguilement that leads men to their death – except for the crew of the Argo who, led by Orpheus’ voice, escaped their threat.⁵⁰ Orpheus’ song works the same way as the Sirens’, but the ‘fundamental story’ depicts the musician as torn. As opposed to the Sirens, who are only imagined as agents of delight, the musician is both agent of pleasure (enchancing his audience) and himself victim of an irresistible force: love. Part of the evocativeness of the myth comes from this tug of war, within the person of the musician, of different powers. The relationship between love and music is reconfigured in different versions of the myth: in some versions, Orpheus manages to bring Eurydice back to the world of the living, thus illustrating the power of song (and love itself) to overcome death and the strongest powers of nature. Yet in other accounts, the backwards glance of Orpheus, cast at the verge of success, makes him lose his beloved.⁵¹ The point here is not to argue for an interpretation of the lethal look, much debated and variously understood as statement on the psychology of love or that of the creative mind – forgetful, overconfident, distrustful of the gods, etc.; what is important is that the myth is the projection of important ideas about the possibility of the coexistence of both elements. The counterpart to this idea of the unbearable struggle of music and love in the person of the musician is that song can be seen as compensation, or a substitute, for love, such as Orpheus sees it after Eurydice’s death.⁵²

This brings me to one last area of debate, or conceptualization of aspects of *mousikē* explored in the myth: the musician’s death.⁵³ Some versions of the myth make the poet die at the

hands of Thracian women, who are irate that Orpheus turned to homosexuality after Eurydice's second death and even seduced their husbands.⁵⁴ Continuing the logic of Orpheus' entrancing song, some poets represent the spears and stones cast by the Maenads as charmed by the song and reluctant to wound the singer until the women's raucous shouting drowns out the music (*Met.* 11.9–14). Others, in a recast of ideas about fertility or vegetation divinities, have Orpheus dismembered by the women, his head and instrument thrown into the water. Violent, unusual deaths are not an uncommon motif among poet-musicians, but this one also makes a statement about the *amouisia* of the Maenads, their lack of being affected by the music.⁵⁵ The motif can be interpreted as the defeat of art in the face of the natural necessity of the body. But the theme of the hero's death is intimately connected to another one: that of the power of his instrument. Orpheus' lyre, washed up in Lesbos (itself of course a significant place in the history of *mousikē*), is imagined as still playing music, as it outlives the mortal body of the musician in a form of triumph of art over the necessity of nature.⁵⁶ Locating the source of music 'in' the object allows one, again, to think through the idea of where the potential of music resides, another form of which being the tradition that Orpheus added strings to Hermes' lyre to increase its melodic range. The musical instrument is at the same time the materialization of the intangible power of music, a repository of sounds that can be activated by other musicians, a talisman, and token of the continuity in musical practice.⁵⁷

This selective overview of important areas of debate has by no means aimed at offering an interpretation of the myth, but rather at showing that moments of the life of the mythological, and archetypal, musician are ways to tackle important questions about *mousikē*, the beauty of song, the delight that it provides and the way that music shapes one's life. Seeing events of the life of Orpheus as the place where the imaginary of music is projected and where aesthetic problems are considered provides the 'fundamental story' for the musician's life, versions of which get reconfigured in biographical anecdotes. It is as if the musician's limbs came back to life again and

‘It is Orpheus when there is singing’

again in individual body snippets, in the form of anecdotal moments. I now turn to these.

Musical lives

An apt metaphor for the fragmentary form of the anecdote on musical topics is the dismembered body of Orpheus: anecdotes are ‘live’ fragments where the voice of Orpheus can still be heard.⁵⁸ Most of the biographical anecdotes on musicians do not come from musicological sources, but from works, often postdating the life of the artist sometimes by several centuries, whose main purpose is entirely different: memoirs, collections of apophthegms, *mirabilia*, volumes of natural history or geography, scholia, lexica and poetic works imagining other poets (such as Hermesianax’ *Leontion*) are some of the places where one finds moments of musical lives explored. If formulaic elements can be observed in anecdotes, it is because the interest is usually less in the musician than in questions brought up by the presence of music in *his* (or her) life. I have chosen to focus on a few representative stories about fourth-century BC musicians often associated with the showy ‘New Music’. These anecdotes illustrate the overlap of three different ideas that are also conceptualized in the Orpheus myth: the origins of musical skill and talent; the tension and overlap between music and *eros*; and the place attributed to the instrument in the musician’s life.⁵⁹ The choice of this corpus of ‘New Music’ anecdotes is not innocent: it is partially because I know it best, but most importantly because anecdotes about the late classical *melici* do not allow us, for the most part, to treat them like other anecdotes about poet-composers. They illustrate a clear divorce between the importance that the musicians had as cultural figures in a tradition (no matter how reviled and marginalized they appear to be in anecdotes and their later reception in literary history) and the absence of their *works* from the canon – as far as we know, their dithyrambs, nomes and other melic productions were not edited by the Alexandrians.⁶⁰ This gap between the almost entire absence of a work (a text, a score) on which to anchor our understanding of the

musicians sets them in striking contrast with other artists – poets whose work was canonized in editions and commented on by critics, or artists whose products endured through time and could still be viewed several centuries later by travellers or fans. Because of this, the anecdotes about these musical figures lend themselves particularly readily to be read as a form of discourse on music as phenomenon, as making, as performance, rather than solely as a discourse on a musical work or a poetic product.⁶¹

Just like the Orpheus myth, many anecdotes about historical musicians focus on the question of who taught, or begat, whom: the *topos* that famous teachers educated (or begat, or loved) famous pupils is a recurrent feature of biographies. Pindar learned the *aulos* from Lasus; Terpander was the son of Homer, Stesichorus that of Hesiod, etc. The *diadochoi* tradition allows preserving the idea of a continued, unfractured *mousikē*, living through different bodies and keeping its power through generations.⁶² But an anecdote about the fourth-century BC Telesias, reported in the pseudo-Plutarchian *De musica*, takes this reflection to another level:

That training and teaching are responsible for the proper practice or the perversion of music was made clear by Aristoxenus, who says (fr. 76 Wehrli) that among his contemporaries Telesias of Thebes was brought up in his youth on the most beautiful music (τραφήναι ἐν τῇ καλλίστῃ μουσικῇ) and learned (μαθεῖν) the works of the distinguished poets, in particular Pindar, Dionysius of Thebes, Lamprus, Pratinas and all the other lyric poets who composed good music for the lyre; in addition, he was a fine aulos-player and was well instructed (παιδείας ἱκανῶς διαπονηθῆναι) in all the other branches of a complete musical education; but when he left his youth behind him he was so completely seduced (σφόδρα ἐξαπατηθῆναι) by the elaborate music of the theatre that he came to despise the fine composers on whom he had been brought up and began learning by heart (ἐκμανθάνειν) the works of Philoxenus and Timotheus – and the most elaborate and innovative works at that; but when he tried his hand at composition and attempted both styles, the Pindaric and the Philoxenean, he failed to achieve success in the Philoxenean, simply because of the fine training (καλλίστην ἀγωγὴν) he had since his boyhood. ([Plutarch], *On Music* 1142b–c)

The emphasized opening and closing sentences seem to be the justification for quoting the anecdote: the passage presents

itself as a discourse on the value of training and teaching as ways to prevent music from ‘perversion’ (διαστροφή). This is indeed how some critics read it;⁶³ but the anecdote, I think, offers more than the explicit point that Aristoxenus claims to be making. If the beginning of the story shows the power of early training in good music, its conclusion compromises this very statement, as Telesias’ good education does not prevent him from being seduced by another type of music.⁶⁴ Two types of relationship with music seem here to be distinguished from each other: one that comes by learning thoroughly (ἐκμανθάνειν), the other that comes from being suckled (τραφῆναι) on a certain type of music. The language is metaphorical, but it does express the idea that the real success, and payoff, of someone’s musical education comes from something more deeply rooted, and also more inexplicable, than mastery of technical knowledge. Reflecting on the passage, Andrew Barker goes one step further and states that:

despite his technical mastery of the kinds and combinations of modulation, melodic embellishment, rhythmic irregularity and so on which were characteristic of the New Music, *he lacked the special kind of musical intuition or judgment that enabled a Timotheus or a Philoxenus to deploy them effectively*, identifying the particular devices which would best serve their musical purposes at specific moments in their compositions and would be likely to elicit their audiences’ enthusiasm. (My emphasis.)⁶⁵

This suggests that the anecdote is making more than an ethical statement and reflects on ideas about the source of the power of music and the idea of musical talent. On Barker’s reading, what justifies the success of a certain type of music is a sort of ‘intuition or judgment’ in the musician, which cannot be learned. Reading the biographical passage in those terms enriches the type of discourse which we see the anecdote as participating into: it is not only an apology for conservative music, but a form of rumination about what makes music successful and what makes the ‘artist’, a reconfiguration of the idea of the hero born of a Muse, in a foreign and savage land, and taught by the god of music.⁶⁶

The story also illustrates a second theme – that of the seductive power of music and the obsession that it creates in

an audience. An accomplished instrumentalist, Telesias is essentially presented as a fanatical audience of one, entirely subject to the pleasure that the music provides. The verb used to describe his infatuation (ἐξαπατάω, utterly seduce) has the connotations of deception and beguilement that one finds in the vocabulary of love and underlines the continuity between musical and erotic attraction. Telesias' response to the music is an urge to recreate, and to arrogate to himself the power of arousing the emotions that the music of Timotheus and Philoxenus aroused in him. Listening is not enough, Telesias wants to appropriate it and be able to produce it with the same efficiency as Timotheus and Philoxenus.⁶⁷ This mimetic drive, or the impulse to want the music played again, to have the same emotions they bring up reproduced, is a central idea in the ancient discourse about *mousikē*.⁶⁸ It takes a different form, but represents the same erasure between subject and object, creator and recipient of pleasure in an anecdote about another musician, Philoxenus (the dithyrambist who held so much sway over Telesias):

Clarchus says (fr. 57 Wehrli) that Philoxenus would wash and then go round the houses in his own city and others accompanied by slaves carrying olive oil, wine, fish paste, vinegar and other pleasant relishes (καὶ ἄλλα ἡδύσματα), and upon entering other men's houses would add the necessary seasoning to what was being boiled; then he would gulp it down and have a feast. Once when he landed at Ephesus he found the fish-market empty and on asking the reason was told that the fish had all been bought up for a wedding. So he washed and turned up uninvited at the bridegroom's house; after the banquet he sang a wedding-song, which begins

'Marriage, most radiant of gods!'

and beguiled everyone, for he was a dithyrambic poet (πάντας ἐμυχαγώγησεν ἦν δὲ διθυραμβοποιός). When the bridegroom said 'Will you dine here tomorrow too?' he replied, 'Yes, if there is no fish for sale'. (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 1.5f–6b (=PMG 828))

Several motifs overlap: (1) that of the musician bringing voluntarily the ἡδύσματα, the 'seasonings that make things pleasant', into everybody's life; (2) that of the musician experiencing pleasure himself; and (3) that of the musician beguiling

everyone’s soul.⁶⁹ These elements constitute a spectrum of the idea of pleasure, between senses and soul and, like in the Telesias anecdote, erase the boundaries between creator and consumer of pleasure: Philoxenus, a model of audience, is the first to experience what he creates. The musician is depicted as beguiling his audience (πάντας ἐψυχάζωγησεν), and as providing through his music the sensory and mental equivalent to the seasonings that he added to the food. There is of course more to the anecdote than a simple statement on the pleasure provided by music, and the embeddedness of the anecdote in a discourse on money, *xenia* and passions also needs to be considered.⁷⁰ But this type of socio-historical reading should not obscure another one, that of the anecdote as an area of thought about responses to music. While food is ostensibly being bartered, song is the source of the real craving, and the beggar-singer turns into the object for which people beg. The body of the performer is the place where the dual nature of the origins and effect of music, on the senses and on the soul, is located. The absent gustatory pleasure is transformed into song, in a continuum of desire and satisfaction through the senses and intellectual delight. This representation of the musician at dinner belongs to a more profound exploration of the ontology of song and the voice, as straddling the domain of the physical and the metaphysical, the corporeal and the spiritual. No access to the text or the music of the late classical musicians will explain this type of query about song and the voice; it belongs to a different type of discourse, one pursued in both philosophy and myths, not only that of Orpheus but also, for example, that invented by Plato about the musical cicadas – another type of vocal performer creating delight and a form of *psychagogia*, living at the limits of the corporeal, and embodying the dual aspect of song and voice, profoundly rooted in the physical yet close to the Muses and the divine.⁷¹

This idea of the liminality of the musician’s voice and song, hovering between the physical (the lips, the mouth, the lungs of the performer and the ears of the listeners) and the spiritual (the psyche of performer and audience), is further explored in a

second anecdote about Philoxenus that reconfigures the same elements:

Phaenias (fr. 13 Wehrli) says that the poet Philoxenus of Cythera, who was extremely fond of fish (περιπαθὴς ὦν τοῖς ὀψοῖς), was dining once with Dionysius when he saw that a large mullet had been served to the tyrant and a small one to himself. He took the fish and put it to his ear; and when Dionysius asked why he was doing that, he replied that he was writing his *Galatea* and wanted some information about Nereus from the mullet but that the fish that had been served to Dionysius was older and had a clear understanding of all he wanted to know; at which the tyrant laughed and sent him the mullet that was at his place. Dionysius used to enjoy getting drunk with Philoxenus; but when the poet was caught in the act of seducing (διαφθείρων) the tyrant's mistress Galatea, he was thrown into the quarries. There he wrote his *Cyclops* and adapted the plot to his own unhappy fate (ἐν αἷς ποιῶν τὸν Κύκλωπα συνέθηκε τὸν μῦθον εἰς τὸ περὶ αὐτὸν γενόμενον πάθος), making Dionysius the Cyclops, the pipe-girl Galatea and himself Odysseus. (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 1.6e–7a (=PMG 816))

The passage can be read on multiple levels. On the one hand, it can be interpreted as an example of the ‘Chamaeleontic method’:⁷² Phaenias imagines an episode of the artist's life, based on his knowledge of the musical piece attributed to Philoxenus, a dithyramb staging the story of the Cyclops as a scorned lover, entitled *Cyclops* or *Galatea* (PMG 815–23). But one can also read it backwards, not as a naïve attempt to find the real circumstances of composition of the *Cyclops*, but as a way to think about the life of Philoxenus as erasing boundaries between creative and personal life. On the one hand, there is no discontinuity between the musician's amorous experience and his artistic output: a failed episode of erotic pursuit (Galatea) is immediately converted into a creative enterprise (*Galatea*). On the other hand, the episode can be read as a reflection on the power of art to imitate reality, or rather to bend it to its needs: Phaenias reflects on two aspects of a creative life, first showing the musician's art inspiring events of his life (the topic of his dithyramb dictating the choice of allegorical speech addressed to Dionysius), then showing the conditions of creation of the work, Philoxenus drawing inspiration from everyday events. The body and senses of the musician feature prominently throughout the anecdote: Philoxenus

appears as both directed by his senses and detached from them, obeying his appetites (for fish, drink and sex) and overcoming them through his art. This aesthetic position is in sharp contrast with the motif of the pipe-girl (the *aulētris*), who in the fictional transposition loses all power to provide sensual (musical and other) pleasure, as the haughty beloved of the Cyclops. Here, as in the Orpheus myth, the anecdote is a locus of reflection on the ability of music to both stimulate the senses and displace the satisfaction of desire through spiritual ways, to make composition compensation, or triumph over life (and the threat of death in the case of Philoxenus in the quarries).

This leads me to turn to one last area of thought on *mousikē*, and another type of exploration of the dual nature of music (both incorporeal and grounded in the physical world), namely questions about the musical instrument and its power. In his *Spartan Customs*, Plutarch relates an anecdote, variously told about Terpander, Timotheus or Phrynis:⁷³

If someone were to transgress in any way the rules of ancient music, they would not permit it. But even Terpander, one of the oldest and the best kitharodes of his time as well as a devoted admirer of the deeds of heroes, the Ephors nonetheless fined, and carried away his instrument and nailed it to a wall because he put in just one extra string for the sake of the variegation in the notes (ποικίλου τῆς φωνῆς χάριν); for they approved only the simpler melodies. Timotheus was competing at the Carneia, one of the ephors took a knife and asked the poet from what end of his instrument he wanted the strings in excess of the traditional seven cut out. (Plutarch, *Customs of the Spartans* 238c–d)

As in the Telesias story, on one level the anecdote is introduced as an exemplum exalting the value of conservative simplicity and moderation. But while Terpander is explicitly praised for his skill and for his traditional tastes (he is an admirer of heroic deeds), it is his instrument that is held responsible for introducing variegation and excess. This idea could be interpreted as something coming from a reading of the musicians’ own songs: in the case of Terpander, a fragment describes his seven-tone lyre (fr. 4 Gostoli), and the *sphragis* of Timotheus makes a statement about μέτροις ῥυθμοῖς τ’ ἑνδεκακρουμάτοις (meters and rhythms of eleven strokes, *PMG* 791, 230). Yet there is more.

As suggested above, the instrument itself represents an important, symbolic element in thinking about the (constantly reinvented) musical tradition. The idea of the instrument standing in for the musician is commonly used by the comic poets.⁷⁴ This is an idea different from the literary critical reading of the *style* in the body of the composer (for example, the effeminacy of the poetry of Agathon made visible through this garb and countenance). Here, the body of the performer is the place where the invisible part of music becomes visible. Both musician's body and instrument are a way to materialize what is otherwise impossible to represent: the incorporeality of sounds and the ineffable ways in which music affects listeners.

But one can go still further: the often-quoted *sphragis* of Timotheus' *Persians*, which gives itself for an autobiographic statement (invented or authentic), and which can be taken for the source from which the anecdote about the hyperchordic kithara is derived, can be read as an aesthetic meditation, drawing its power from reconfiguring Orpheus' fundamental story. At the end of his 'defense' against Spartan critics who attack his song, Timotheus gives the following catalogue:

πρῶτος ποικιλόμουσον Ὀρ- φεὺς <χέλ>υν ἐτέκνωσεν υἱὸς Καλλιόπας <ς κόρας Διὸς> Πιερίαν· Τέρπανδρος δ' ἐπὶ τῷ δέκα ζεῦξε Μοῦσαν ἐν ᾧδαϊς· Λέσβος δ' Αἰολία ν<ιν> Ἀν- τίσσα γείνατο κλεινόν· νῦν δὲ Τιμόθεος μέτροις ῥυθμοῖς τ' ἐνδεκακρουμάτοις κίθαριν ἐξαντέλλει, θησαυρόν πολὺμυνον οἷ- ξας Μοῦσάν θαλαμειτόν· Μίλητος δὲ πόλις νιν ἅ θρέψας ἅ δυωδεκατειχέος λαοῦ πρωτέος ἐξ Ἀχαιῶν.	225 230 235
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Orpheus, son of Calliope <daughter of Zeus> and native of Pieria, was the first to beget the tortoise-shell lyre of dappled music. Then Terpander yoked the Muse to ten

‘It is Orpheus when there is singing’

songs. Aeolian Lesbos gave birth to this man to give fame to Antissa. And now Timotheus with his meters and rhythms of eleven strokes makes the *kithara* spring up, opening the treasure rich in songs hidden in the inner-chamber of the Muses. It is the city of Miletus that brought him up, twelve-walled, the first of the Achaean people.

Timotheus *PMG* 791, 221–36 (Greek text Sevieri (2011))

In his self-fashioning, Timotheus relies on many of the tropes I have read in the Orpheus myth: the motif of musicians’ genealogy, the continuity in musical practice, and the iconic presence of the instrument. The catalogue establishes a connection between performers by placing the instrument at the centre of the anecdote: the innovations that each successive generation introduces establish continuity in the practice of *mousikē* in a self-perpetuating tradition. The Muse-motif ensures further connection: the Pierian Muse gave birth to Orpheus, was yoked to song by Terpander and finally discloses her inner-chamber to Timotheus. Yet beyond these points of connection between Timotheus and the mythological past, I suggest that there is a real engagement with an aesthetic question (and one that has not been suggested before, despite the recent flourishing of Timothean studies): that of the response to his song.⁷⁵ This part of the *sphragis* is connected to the previous one in more ways than have been acknowledged before. By casting himself as the continuator of Orpheus, imagined as charming the beasts, and of Terpander (who was able to calm civil strife at Sparta), the Timothean *persona* makes a subtle statement about the type of response he expects to get, including through the symbolic continuation of the power of his instrument. The fact that he presents himself as unable to charm the Spartans, who ‘hound’ him and threaten to kill him, can be read as a statement of their *amousia*: cast in the role of the Thracian women hunting the musician, Timotheus describes himself overtly as replaying the tragedy of Orpheus. Besides making a statement about the man, the *sphragis* is a powerful reminder of the entrancing power of song and kitharodic performance, a practice that comes from the gods and rouses a certain type of emotional

and psychic response: the peaceful harmony created by Orpheus and exemplified in the final lines of Timotheus' song, calling for *eunomia*, both good custom (νόμος) and good song (νόμος) – and I would add, good pasture (νομός), in a form of harmony with nature reminiscent of that created by Orpheus' music.

Fragments of Orpheus

A good place to end this examination of the creative lives of musicians might be to return where we started, with Ann Wroe's *Orpheus*. The biography does not end in Lesbos, with the dismembered poet or the singing lyre, but in the French Alps, with the portrait of the exhausted Rilke, finished with the composition of his *Sonnets*. Having been 'visited' by Orpheus for several weeks, Rilke comes down to breakfast to find his coffee cup, Austrian cake and the first primroses brimming with sun, announcing the very spring that he sang in his now completed *Sonnets*. This final image continues the dialogue on aesthetic themes (including the origins of inspiration and art's mimesis of nature) that I have examined in the case of ancient biographical anecdotes. Moments of the lives of musicians, I have argued, are derived from the 'fundamental story' of the mythical hero Orpheus. This continuity goes beyond the use of similar motifs: myth and anecdotes are different ways to reflect on important problems of music (the nature of the power of musical sounds, their connection to nature and the divine, the delight they create, and the responses they call for), issues that could best be described as aesthetic problems. Each time these questions are engaged with in the form of anecdotes, the myth of Orpheus gets reactivated. As Wroe puts it:

to some degree you could argue that each age revisits him. Yet none puts its stamp on him definitively, because the young man with the lyre is different for everyone who meets him. Each encounter makes him anew, until it is clear that the vulnerable human figure still conceals his most primal incarnation: the pulse of creation, the song of life.⁷⁶

In following Orpheus, we might not have found a 'life' of a musician, nor 'biographies' of individual musicians; but this

journey has shown how the biographical anecdotes about musicians are embodied questions of aesthetics, and take us away from the man and closer to the nature of the art. When we overcome the instinct to find an individual life (fictional or not) behind every biographical anecdote, we are better suited to think about ancient categories that no longer exist as such (*mousikē* and *mousikos*) and to engage with their conceptual framework.

Notes

- 1 Kris and Kurz (1979). Mary Lefkowitz, Chapter 8 provides a rich overview of ancient biographers’ interest for poets’ sources of inspiration and strategies to account for them (including through poetic initiation and *Dichterweihe*). Verity Platt, Chapter 12 contrasts ancient artist anecdotes that ‘rarely supply details about their protagonist’s childhood and family’, with the rich narrative arcs of Renaissance artists’ lives, as schematized by Soussloff (1997).
- 2 Wroe (2011) 15 for quotation, and 3 for the next.
- 3 The bibliography on the art inspired by Orpheus, from the first three operas ever written in the seventeenth century (*Orfeo*) to twentieth-century sculptures, is enormous. For rich interpretations of the figure of Orpheus in different arts, see Warden (1982) (for its use in literature); Newby (1987) (for its use in aesthetics); Bernstock (1991) (for its use in art); Abbate (2001) 1–54 (for its use in opera). For a lucid presentation of ancient testimonies about Orpheus, see Linforth (1941).
- 4 ‘Song culture’ is the term used by John Herington to describe ‘a society whose prime medium for the expression and communication of its most important feelings and ideas was song’ (Herington (1985) 3). As Haines (2010) 9 remarks, ‘song is one of the most common species of music’ (understanding song as ‘occasional act of creation, written for a time and then discarded. Often a new song recycles an old one, preserving little parts of it until eventually that new song morphs into the next new song and so on, until traces of the old generating song can no longer be detected’).
- 5 On the idea that the definition of ‘music’ is culture-dependent, Higgins (1991) 10–20; Goehr (1992) 120–47, where she traces the changes in meaning that the ‘serious music’ has undergone throughout its history: ‘Before 1800 the pivotal question in philosophical thought about music, “what is music?”’, asked for

specification of music's *extra-musical* function and significance. Music was predominantly understood as regulated by, and thus defined according to, what we would now think of as extra-musical ideals' (122).

- 6 For short overviews of the specific questions associated with non-vocal music, see Fischer and Davies (2009), who point out that song itself is often divided between 'art song' (which, again, revolves around the concept of a work) and 'popular songs' that everybody can sing (Grey (2014)). On the history of the idea of instrumental music, starting with Orpheus and Pythagoras, see most recently Bonds (2014).
- 7 The impressive 'prosopography of ancient Greek music' compiled by Aspiotes (2006) includes, among 'musicians', lyric and elegiac poets, performers of solo and choral song and instrumental music, but also 'parodists', rhapsodes, a luthier and voice coaches (*phonaskoi*). On the historical dialectic between active, 'muscular' music (music that one plays) and passive music (music that one listens to), see Barthes (1982) 231–5.
- 8 This term is used to designate artists who compose and perform their own songs to their own instrumental accompaniment, such as Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Charles Trénet or Claudio Baglioni.
- 9 On Machaut, see Leech-Wilkinson (2002). On the history of the relationship between poetry and music in Western music, see Winn (1981); on the split in the age-long association of poetry and music in the medieval period, see Butterfield (2002).
- 10 Murray and Wilson (2004) 1.
- 11 On the importance of choruses and choral culture in archaic and classical culture, see Billings, Budelmann and Macintosh (2014). The intertwining of choral performance and education is encapsulated in Plato's phrase (*Laws* 654a) ἀπαιδευτος ἀχόρευτος (the uneducated man is one without choral experience). One still needs to note that *mousikos* can refer to a specific type of musical expertise. An example of a *mousikos* is Glaucon in Plato's *Republic*: 'Socrates, who claims to know nothing about the *harmoniai* (399a5) appeals to him for information about them, adding σὺ γὰρ μουσικός ("for you are a *mousikos*") by way of explanation' (Barker (2012) 7).
- 12 The most explicit statement is that of Strabo 10.3.10: πρόπολοι δὲ τῶν Μουσῶν οἱ πεπαιδευμένοι πάντες (all educated men are servants of the Muses). On *mousikē*, and its importance in the song-culture of the Greeks: Koller (1963) 5–16; Herington (1985); Kurke (2000); Murray and Wilson (2004) 1–8.
- 13 Barker (2012) 7–9.

- 14 For such an understanding of non-musical aspects of *mousikē*, see Goehr (1998), who makes the following provocative statement: 'As paradoxical as it sounds, connecting music to *mousikē* demonstrates that music is philosophical and political already by virtue of music's being *autonomously musical*' (1, original emphasis), in a book that describes Wagner's 'attempted restoration of the concept of *mousikē* into modern musical practice' (2).
- 15 Halliwell (2012) 17.
- 16 On modern musical biography in particular, and its 'ambiguous place in musicology from its inception as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century', see Pekacz (2006) 1–16 (3 for quotation), who argues for the need of 'new paradigms' of musical biography, as the discipline of musicology itself changes.
- 17 Franklin (2012) 722 warns, however, that the treatise 'may not have been annalistic at all, nor as universalizing as generally thought'.
- 18 Leo (1990): 104–5; cf. Johanna Hanink and Richard Fletcher, Chapter 1.
- 19 Aristoxenus' curious *Bios Telestou* (fr. 117 Wehrli = Antig. *Mir.* 40) presents an event in the life of a dithyrambic composer mostly concerned with sound and performance rather than words. On Aristoxenus and biography, see Huffman (2012).
- 20 On the Peripatetics' use of the anecdote, see Momigliano (1993) 68–73; on the genre, Arrighetti (2007). Verity Platt, Chapter 12, examines the methodological challenges posed by the artist-anecdotes' relationship to the genre of biography.
- 21 Eur. *Antiope* frs. 183–8, 219, 189, 191, 193–4, 196–202, 220 Collard. On the values defended by the two brothers, see Gibert (2009), who sees the conflict between the two brothers as a debate between two forms of 'quietism' rather than as a conflict between quietism and political activism.
- 22 Quoted by Halliwell (2012) 15.
- 23 Lefkowitz (1981) and (2012), Compton (2006) and Kivilo (2010) all consider melic composers as 'poets'.
- 24 Christopher Small's influential idea of 'musicking' is particularly relevant for my purposes here. For Small, 'music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. The apparent thing "music" is a figment, an abstraction of the action, whose reality vanishes as soon as we examine it at all closely' (Small (1998) 2). Small encapsulates it in a pithy formulation: '*performance does not exist in order to present musical works but rather, musical works exist in order to give performers something to perform*' (8, original emphasis). What he calls 'musicking' encompasses some fundamental aspects of Greek *mousikē*: '*to music is to take*

- part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing' (9, original emphasis). Where 'musicking' and *mousikē* draw apart, however, is on the larger idea of culture and cultivation of the mind, even though Small sees musicking as a 'model, or . . . metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world' (13).
- 25 Kris and Kurz (1979) 12.
 - 26 I borrow the term 'fundamental story' from Bettini (1999), although I use the term slightly differently. Bettini tackles stories (anecdotes and myths) about the visual arts, which concentrate on what he calls the 'fundamental story': 'the story created by the moves of [a] restricted set of pawns – the lover, the beloved, and the image' (4). By 'fundamental story', I mean the story created by the elements present in Orpheus' life: sound, pleasure, musical instrument, senses and death. These elements get shuffled differently in different anecdotes about musicians.
 - 27 For discussions of the gap between modern terms and concepts ('art' and 'aesthetics') and ancient realities, the fundamental essay (in two parts) is Kristeller (1951) and (1952). For a reevaluation of the gap between modern and ancient, and suggestions on how to engage in a productive dialogue, see Halliwell (2002) 1–22, Porter (2009) and Peponi (2012) 1–13.
 - 28 LeVen (2013) focuses on *chreiae* of the Hellenistic poet Machon and presents the genre of the anecdote as located at the intersection of different narrative, socio-cultural and intellectual practices. LeVen (2014) 113–49 concentrates on the figure of the late-classical melic poet Philoxenus and discusses the narrative strategies involved in the making of his 'life', and reads the anecdotes as a form of discourse on the changing position of the artist in society in the late-classical period.
 - 29 LeVen (forthcoming) argues that myths were, for the ancients, fundamental places for conceptualizing, disseminating and debating aesthetic ideas.
 - 30 Athenaeus 14.632c calls Orpheus 'most musical' (μουσικώτατος) of the demigods.
 - 31 Bowra (1952) 123: 'He was already a subject of poetry in the sixth century, as Ibycus' tantalizing reference to *ὀνομάκλυτον Ὀρφεῖν* [PMG 306] shows, but at this time his main interest seems to have lain in his gift of song and a little later in his hideous death'.

- 32 Segal (1989) 2.
- 33 In particular in Norden (1934) and Graf (1974). Detienne (1971) offers a masterful reading of the myth of 'honeyed Orpheus' unraveling the rich web of sociological, alimentary and sexual codes in which the story is inscribed. For Detienne, all other interpretations are 'parceled readings, fascinated by the shimmering of a single motif' (21, my translation).
- 34 Restani (1994).
- 35 An important aspect of the myth that I chose not to discuss is that of Orpheus' mysticism and his asceticism, examined in particular by Graf (1974). Reflections on this point will aid our understanding of the relationship between *mousikē* and religious practice (on which also Hardie (2004)).
- 36 *Orph. Fr.* T. 23 Kern. Pindar fr. 128c11–12. Bacchylides 29(d) 8 M. Plato *Symp.* 179 d. M. The earliest reference is in P. Oxy. LIII 3698 (the *Corinthiaca* of Eumelus): Οἰάγρου φ[ίλος υἱὸς | πλῆκς τρωί ἐπε[ιρήτιζε.
- 37 *Orph. Fr.* T. 22 Kern. [Apoll.] 1.9.16 (who says Καλλιόπης μὲν οὖν καὶ Οἰάγρου, κατ' ἐπὶ κλησιν δὲ Ἀπόλλωνος ... Ὀρφεύς). Pindar (*Pyth.* 4.176–7) describes Orpheus as ἐξ Ἀπόλλωνος δὲ φορμιγκτὰς ἀοιδᾶν πατήρ | ἔμολεν, εὐαίνητος Ὀρφεύς (much-praised Orpheus, the father of songs, came from Apollo the phorminx-player). Scholars since antiquity have debated the meaning of the ἐξ Ἀπόλλωνος: Asclepiades of Tragilus (*FGrH* 12 F 6a) and Menaechmus of Sicyon (*FGrH* 131 F2) maintains that it refers to the paternity of Apollo (since Apollo is ἡγεμών... τῆς κιθαρωιδίας, leader of *kitharoidia*); others (Ammonius) think that it refers to the agent sending Orpheus.
- 38 *Orph. Fr.* T. 24 Kern for Calliope (Timoth. *Pers.* 234; Pl. *Rep.* 364e; Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 1.77; schol. to Ar. *Frogs* 1032); for others, *Orph. Fr.* T. 25 Kern.
- 39 As Restani (1994) 197 puts it: 'su Orfeo convergono antitetici istinti: di fascino magico o di ferocia mortale' ('in Orpheus, antithetical instincts converge: of magical enchantment and mortal savagery'). There is profound ambiguity about Orpheus' Thracian side (on which *Fr. Orph.* T. 30–7 Kern). In seventh-century iconography, Orpheus is dressed like a Greek and participates in the Argonautic expedition, but starting in the fourth century, he is depicted as a Thracian. His barbarian origins, and his connection with writing, however, are questioned when the book starts becoming an important object (on which see Detienne (2002) 132–3). Thrace is also the fatherland of the musical heroes Musaeus, Thamyras (on which Eur. *Rhes.* 944–6) and Eumolpus.

- 40 Restani (1994) 195.
- 41 All of these relationships are documented in *Fr. Orph.* T. 160–72 Kern.
- 42 This tendency to make music a ‘family business’ reflected real-life practice. Sutton (1987) describes the ‘theatrical families of Athens’, and in his survey of Theban auletes Roesch (1989) presents several families of musicians (including that of the famous auletes Potamon and Pronomos).
- 43 Focusing on the power of the voice is also a way to engage with a whole network of ideas about orality and performance. A passage of Euripides’ *Alcestis* (962–71) describes the voice (γῆρυς) of Orpheus as having inscribed (κατέγραψεν) Thracian tablets. On the importance of the figure of Orpheus for thinking about writing, see Detienne (2002) and Calame (2011); for Orpheus and the rhapsodic tradition, see Martin (2001).
- 44 See *Orph. Fr.* T. 46–55 Kern. For example Sim. *PMG* 567; Aesch. *Ag.* 1629–30; Eur. *Med.* 543, *Iph. in Aul.* 1211, *Bacch.* 561–3, Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 1.26. For visual representations: *LIMC* VII/2 (1994: 57).
- 45 This type of tranquil response to music is analysed by Peponi (2012) 14–32.
- 46 Segal (1989) 14–15.
- 47 Segal (1989) 5, quoting Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, 1.26.11.
- 48 Detienne (1971) 19.
- 49 Segal (1989) 155–98. For Orpheus’ song in opera, see Abbate (2001) 19–27.
- 50 Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 4.891–911.
- 51 On the different versions: see Bowra (1952).
- 52 Restani (1994) 198.
- 53 *Fr. Orph.* T. 113–35 Kern.
- 54 On Orpheus’ *amor puerorum*, see *Fr. Orph.* T. 77 Kern (Phanocles, probably derived from earlier sources); on Orpheus’ forsaking love of women, Ovid, *Met.* X.79–85 and *Met.* X more generally.
- 55 Kivilo (2010) 221 for ‘unusual death’ as motif.
- 56 A different version plays with the same motif: on a (ca. 400 BC) red-figure cup in Cambridge, Musaeus is represented as writing down precepts from the severed head of Orpheus.
- 57 Leydi (1991), in a section devoted to the ‘depth of oral memory’, describes the ‘sedimento magico’ that remains in the instrument (70–6); Restani (1994) 199 goes further and suggests that this magic sediment can be transmitted to future hands. Several anecdotes about ancient musicians rely on this trope: the *Vita Euripidis* (VE 27 = Hermippus fr. 84 Bollansée) recounts how

‘following Euripides’ death, Dionysius [of Syracuse] sent a talent to Euripides’ heirs to purchase his lyre and writing-tablet and pen. And he ordered the people who procured them for him to dedicate (ἀναθεῖναι) them in the temple of the Muses, having had them inscribed with both his and Euripides’ names’ (trans. Hanink). Lucian (*Adv. indoctum* 15) reports how the same Dionysius ‘once he had figured out that everyone was laughing at him [because he composed wretched tragedies], went to great lengths to get his hands on Aeschylus’ wax-tablets, thinking that through the tablets he too would be divinely inspired (ἐνθεός). Nevertheless, when he wrote upon it he composed things far more ridiculous (μακροῦ γελοιότερα)’ (trans. Hanink).

- 58 The anecdote genre, even in the modern period, seems particularly appropriate for considerations on music: see Crowest (1878); Slonimsky (1948); Lebrecht (1985). See Verity Platt, [Chapter 12](#), who also compares body and anecdote: ‘like the head or limb of a statue, the anecdote is excised from its extant literary *corpus* and reassigned to a text that is ultimately a work of the scholarly imagination’.
- 59 On that last aspect, the editors kindly brought to my attention the fact that Nick Cave’s (2004) album *Orpheus’ Lyre* begins with a song about the creation of the lyre. Conflating two figures (Hermes *inventing* the lyre and Orpheus *exercising his power over nature*), Cave’s Orpheus subverts the myth, as Orpheus, in the Underworld, dreams he invented an instrument with lethal effects (‘Birdies detonated in the sky / Bunnies dashed their brains out on the trees’), a music able to wake God up (‘He hit a G minor 7 / He woke up God from a deep, deep sleep’) and to create cosmic chaos. While the last stanza evokes Orpheus’ last tune (‘Orpheus picked up his lyre for the last time / He was on a real low down bummer’), Cave’s song constitutes another form of reception of the Orpheus myth, staging the power of the musical object that continues to fascinate artists.
- 60 Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1900) 1–24, 63–71 and Pfeiffer (1968) 181–9. The works of the late classical poets did circulate as βιβλοι (papyrus rolls) already during the musicians’ lifetimes (see e.g. Onesicritus, *FGrH* 134 F 38), and the papyrus of Timotheus’ *Persae* (*PMG* 791 = *P. Berol.* 9875) is the best example of that practice. But there is no evidence for the existence of Alexandrian editions of the dithyrambic poets (LeVen (2014) 43–9).
- 61 For an interesting reversal of the relationship between work, composer’s life and performance, see Small (1998) 87–93. Small sees performance (and especially performance of the Great Composers, defined as the fifty or so well-known male composers

active between the birth of Vivaldi in 1678 and the death of Debussy in 1918) as a form of ‘summoning up the spirit of the dead composer’ (87):

It is not surprising that concertgoers and musicians alike should feel a close, direct and personal relationship with those musicians of the past or that they should have an insatiable curiosity about their lives and personalities sufficient to keep alive a whole industry of composer biographies and critical studies; it is their lives and personalities, as well as their values and their vision of order, that are being summoned up here tonight.

The following pages compare the Great Composers to mythological culture heroes who ‘like mythological heroes from Achilles to Abraham Lincoln, from Moses to Che Guevara, have been constructed to serve the needs of present-day people from shards and fragments of biography, and by a kind of back-formation of a personality from the gestural language in which they encoded their vision of human relationships and social order’ (89).

- 62 On the motif of the genealogy of artists, Lasserre (1995).
- 63 For example Rocconi (2012) 83–5.
- 64 On which Power (2012), who connects Telesias to the musician mentioned on a victory inscription (*IG II²* 3029).
- 65 Barker (2012) 21.
- 66 The question is itself brought up in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (436–9), where Apollo asks Hermes how *he* himself learned music, whether it came to him from birth (ἐκ γενετῆς) or as a remarkable gift (δῶρον ἀγαθόν) and teaching (ἐφρασε).
- 67 One can think about it as the same creative urge as that which the narrator of *Daphnis and Chloe* feels when encountering a painting: his aesthetic response is a (mimetic) desire (πόθος) to replicate the painting by his writing (με . . . θαυμάσαντα πόθος ἔσχεν ἀντιγράψαι τῇ γραφῇ, Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* 1.2).
- 68 It is the same drive that Apollo displays in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (420–3), where a delighted response is not enough: the seduced listener, full of desire (ἵμερος, 422) and helpless longing (ἔρος ἀμήχανος, 434) wants to appropriate the music and be able to master the skill of playing the instrument.
- 69 Here the anecdote revolves around the theatricalization and comic materialization of the *topos* of music as a form of cooking. The *topos* is used in several comedies, including (in an inverted form) in Damoxenus’ *Foster Brothers* (fr. 2 KA ap. Ath. 3.102f–103a), where the cook acts like a composer and uses the vocabulary of the *harmonikoi* to describe his cooking. The closest parallel to the anecdote’s description of Philoxenian gastronomic

- 'seasoning' is Aristotle's *Poet.* 1449b26, 1450b16–17, which describes meter and melody as the 'seasoning' (ῥηδύσματα) of tragedy. On the passage, see LeVen (2014) 136.
- 70 On that aspect, see LeVen (2014) 121–49. One could also read the anecdote on the literary critical model: Philoxenus composed a *Deipnon* (*PMG* 836) with some iambic features. The anecdote of Philoxenus at dinner in the (Hipponactean) town of Ephesus would be a form of reinterpreting the element of abuse in the poetry.
- 71 Plato, *Phaedrus* 258e–259e. On the passage, LeVen (forthcoming) ch. 3. On the voice as straddling the domain of the physical and the non-physical, Cavarero (2003) 74–9; Dolar (2006) 59–81.
- 72 On the method see also Johanna Hanink and Richard Fletcher, Chapter 1; Johanna Hanink, Chapter 6; Mary Lefkowitz, Chapter 8; John Henderson, Envoi.
- 73 For Phrynus, Plut. *Mor.* 220c.
- 74 In Aristophanes' *Knights* (531–3), Cratinus is represented as an old lyre, losing its tuning: the body of the instrument becomes a metaphor for that of the composer, in a representative blurring of categories. Pherecrates' *Cheiron* (fr. 155 KA) exploits the same trope (and sexual connotations) of mapping the body of the musician onto his musical instrument.
- 75 This has not, as far as I know, been suggested in any of the main critical readings of this passage of Timotheus: Wilamowitz (1903); Croiset (1903); Janssen (1984); Hordern (2002); Power (2010); Ercoles (2010); Sevieri (2011).
- 76 Wroe (2011) 5.

CHAPTER 12

THE ARTIST AS ANECDOTE: CREATING CREATORS IN ANCIENT TEXTS AND MODERN ART HISTORY

VERITY PLATT

In 2007, the Musée du Louvre devoted an exhibition to the fourth-century BC Greek sculptor Praxiteles that gathered together important evidence for famed works such as his Aphrodite of Knidos and Apollo Sauroktonos.¹ Unlike conventional shows devoted to the work of single artists, the Louvre's curators were faced with a critical problem, for despite Praxiteles' renown, not a single object survives that can be securely attributed to his hand.² Instead, the museum displayed a wealth of Hellenistic and Roman emulations of Praxitelean sculptural types, together with some controversial late Classical pieces and, most tellingly, two empty statue bases from the Athenian Agora inscribed with the artist's name.³ An eloquent illustration of the challenges that face anyone attempting to recover the work of Greek 'Old Masters', the signature stripped of its sculptor's work speaks to the great chasm that separates textual evidence for the activities of Classical artists from the mass of unattributable objects that survive within the archaeological record.⁴ Although Praxiteles' works were rapturously celebrated in ancient literature, the empty bases and imprecise 'copies' of his work that have come down to us from antiquity offer frustratingly vestigial traces of his reputed genius.

Faced with this enduring gap between reputation and *realia*, the Louvre's exhibition sought to convey the compelling nature of Praxiteles' legacy by falling back on a familiar feature of the sculptor's biography – his relationship with the famed courtesan Phryne.⁵ Praxiteles' lover and alleged model, claimed the museum's promotional material, 'lies at the heart of a complex process of identification and attribution,

involving the statues of Aphrodite for which she is thought to have posed, idealized portraits of her by Praxiteles, and draped or nude effigies which may represent either Phryne or Aphrodite'.⁶ In other words, it is impossible to recover and understand Praxiteles' work without peering at it through the lens of a firmly established literary trope, passed down to us by later authors such as Pliny the Elder, Pausanias and Athenaeus.⁷ We need not question the Louvre's accompanying assertion that Phryne inspired a rich *post*-Classical visual tradition, most strikingly demonstrated by the exhibition's inclusion of Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Phryné devant l'Aréopage* (1861), which depicts the orator Hyperides' public revelation of Phryne's 'heavenly' body to counter charges of impiety (Figure 12.1).⁸ However, the courtesan's historical role as a muse and model, her influence on Praxiteles' working practices, stylistic development and iconographic choices – and indeed her very relationship to the sculptor – are far more difficult to determine. First, our literary evidence postdates Praxiteles' *floruit* by centuries, and is based on problematic sources such as defamatory speeches and heavily fictionalized



Figure 12.1: Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Phryné devant l'Aréopage*, 1861. Oil on canvas. Hamburger Kunsthalle. Credit: Art Resource, NY.

Hellenistic biographies.⁹ Second, the very concepts of portrait and model changed significantly during antiquity and do not translate in any straightforward way from texts of the Imperial period to artistic productions of the fourth century BC.¹⁰ Given that any claim about Phryne's influence on Praxiteles' depictions of Aphrodite has important implications for our understanding of Classical approaches to naturalism, anthropomorphism, gender and religious propriety, what role might we assign her in the history of Greek sculpture?¹¹ Phryne's beauty may continue to cast a powerful spell over the reception of ancient art, but should her relationship to Praxiteles be construed as part of his *bios*, or his *Nachleben*?

'Ancient' texts and 'antique' objects

Classical art history is deeply invested in the power of literary sources to give shape to and make sense of archaeology's chance survivals, even as scholars recognize that ancient texts rarely provide straightforward evidence about the production and consumption of the visual arts. For this reason, the 'lives of Greek artists' have been treated rather differently from those of poets, orators and philosophers. Although they raise parallel methodological problems (which I address below), such biographical texts give voice to artefacts that cannot otherwise speak for themselves – a voice on which those who work on mute objects are hopelessly reliant, even as they foreground the material relics of the 'antique'.¹² Like other texts about objects, artists' lives also play an important role in the tussle between 'the sister arts', drawing attention to abiding tensions between word and image, and, concomitantly, the disciplines of Classical Philology and Archaeology. Accordingly, this chapter traces the role of artists' lives in the historiography of ancient art, focusing in particular on their transmission in the form of the biographical anecdote. Should artist anecdotes be read as evidence for artistic production, or are they better understood as part of Classical art's rich reception history? Are such anecdotes evidence of an identifiable genre of 'artists' lives' in antiquity, which might match those of poets and

philosophers? And how has the discipline of art history co-opted the ancient artist anecdote in support of broader intellectual projects of its own?

The methodological dilemmas explored by the Louvre's exhibition point to an enduring problem in the study of Greco-Roman art: while the texts of 'the ancients' have bequeathed us a wealth of literary evidence for the activities of Greek artists of the fifth and fourth centuries BC (most notably in Books 34–37 of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*), few physical remnants of 'the antique' correspond to the works described.¹³ This tension between textual and archaeological evidence is further complicated by a fundamental tension in the historiography of art: should we approach the objects we study by seeking to account for their genesis at the hands of specific artists, or should we view them as the product of broader social and cultural factors? Which should take priority: individualism or historical determinism?

Since the birth of the discipline in the early modern period, conventionally associated with lives of Italian Renaissance artists in the works of Lorenzo Ghiberti (c. 1448) and Giorgio Vasari (1550), art history has been predominantly written as a history of creators, in which practices of attribution and biography play a fundamental role.¹⁴ Most surviving artefacts from the Greco-Roman world, however, resist incorporation into such a model, being neither signed by famous names nor datable to the period of 'Old Masters'. We have no idea who carved such celebrated monuments as the *Ara Pacis Augustae*, for example, while extant signatures such as that of 'Apollonios of Athens, son of Nestor' on the Belvedere Torso (conventionally dated to the first century BC) rarely correspond to figures known to us from the literary record.¹⁵ In this sense, much Greco-Roman art is closer to the visual traditions of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, which owing to the relative anonymity of pre-Renaissance artistic production have traditionally escaped the cult of the creator in favour of a scholarly focus on period style.¹⁶ This more historicizing approach can be traced back to Johann Joachim Winckelmann, whose 1764 *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* explicitly

rejected a biographical approach to ancient art in order to develop a concept of period style grounded in broader cultural-historical trends, rather than individual innovation.¹⁷

Nevertheless, literary references to Greek artists, combined with the application of early modern models of artistic production to antiquity, have led scholars to tie themselves in knots in their attempts to associate ancient works of art with named individuals, from Adolf Furtwängler's subjection of Roman 'copies' to *Meisterforschung* in a quest for Greek originals, to John Beazley's application of Renaissance models of workshop production to Greek vase-painting.¹⁸ A greater disciplinary awareness of these problems in the second half of the twentieth century prompted Rhys Carpenter, Brunilde S. Ridgway and others to write formalist histories of style focused on surviving objects rather than creators, following Carpenter's dictum that Greek sculpture is 'the anonymous product of an impersonal craft'.¹⁹ Likewise, French scholars of vase-painting have pioneered a more anthropologically-grounded approach to images which prioritizes function and iconography, while Jaś Elsner has more recently focused attention on cultural practices of viewing rather than production.²⁰ These endeavours have not, however, stemmed the flow of exhibitions and monographs dedicated to individual sculptors, the analysis of 'personal styles', or the attribution of works to individual hands, even in the case of anonymously produced artefacts such as Cycladic figurines and Roman frescoes.²¹

Because biographical evidence for ancient artists contains data such as names, dates, works, materials and techniques that play crucial supporting roles in the historical armature of classical archaeology, the relevant sources have been repeatedly collected and categorized, from Franciscus Junius' *Catalogus* of craftsmen (published posthumously in 1694) to Rainer Vollkommer's 2001–2004 *Künstlerlexikon der Antike*, a comprehensive handbook of literary and epigraphic references to ancient artists.²² This mass of material, culled from a diverse range of texts, lends itself in particular to encyclopaedic projects, in which decontextualized fragments are reconfigured according to the taxonomic priorities of their compilers.²³

Pliny's *Natural History*, for example (itself repeatedly excerpted and decontextualized by later scholars), incorporates a history of artistic production into a far broader epistemological and ethical enterprise; within this, Books 34–7 focus on physical materials, tracing within each medium of metalwork, paint, marble and precious stone a roughly chronological narrative of the acquisition of artistic skill by a series of *protoi heurantai* ('first discoverers').²⁴ Junius, operating prior to the periodization of ancient art developed by Winckelmann, provides a list of quotations relating to the lives and works of ancient artists (many of them from Pliny), arranged alphabetically by name; significantly, sources for artists are listed alongside evidence for architects, metal-workers and engineers, suggesting a pre-Enlightenment model of artistic production in which the 'Fine Arts' are not yet distinguished from other areas of design and technology.²⁵ Junius' alphabetical structure is resurrected by Vollkommer, who favours the more 'neutral' taxonomy offered by a lexicographical approach. Meanwhile, Johannes Overbeck's monumental *Antike Schriftquellen zur Geschichte der bildenden Künste bei den Griechen* of 1868 attempts a greater degree of historical contextualization, ordering sculptors and painters according to medium and regional school within an overarching system of periodization; Overbeck's anthology has been so indispensable to the discipline that an updated version with detailed commentary was published in 2014 as *Der Neue Overbeck*, running to five volumes.²⁶ The history of art that such compilations facilitate is thus predominantly a history of individual creators. This is despite the many intellectual and methodological difficulties that beset any application of the concept of the 'artist' to antiquity, from the question of workshops (which problematize notions of individual artistic agency) to the knotty relationship between 'art', 'craft' and 'skill' conveyed by the terminology of *technê* and *ars*, and the lack of a collective term for 'artists' (as opposed to *technitai* and *artifikes*, better translated as 'skilled workers' or 'craftsmen').²⁷

Embedded within the taxonomies outlined above is a wealth of biographical material that not only tells us the birthplace,

patronymic, teacher and *floruit* of many artists, but also reveals a rich seam of more 'anecdotal' evidence relating to their professional and personal lives, from Praxiteles' relationship with Phryne to Pheidias' supposed prosecution for embezzling materials from his colossal statue of Athena Parthenos.²⁸ Such episodes have been profoundly influential on the post-antique reception of Greek and Roman art: the history of 'still-life' painting, for example, has been repeatedly conceptualized around the model of naturalism suggested by Pliny's famous account of the contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasius.²⁹ Nevertheless, the concept of the anecdote poses a problem for anyone attempting a history of artistic production: what kind of evidence does it actually provide? Unlike Carlo Dati, who in 1667 published *Vite* of the painters Apelles, Parrhasius, Protogenes and Zeuxis in the style of Vasari, we may question the authenticity of such episodes as 'real' events in the lives of their protagonists.³⁰ Yet it is clear from Pliny's *Natural History* that biographical anecdotes both reflected and influenced attitudes to the figure of the artist in antiquity, while shaping debates about the cultural, religious and ethical ramifications of image-making. For the editors of a recent French volume on artist anecdotes, such material functions as a form of 'theorie subreptice', a subtle, even clandestine means of theorizing about the visual arts by means of narrative exempla, the truth value of which is less important than their conceptual content.³¹ The positivist agenda of much classical archaeology, however, together with the discipline's deep investment in the archival value of the textual source, has historically led to a focus on weeding out the anecdotal in order to harvest the 'documentary' material that remains, which is deemed more useful source-matter.³² Meanwhile, the historical status and value of the anecdote has not yet been adequately resolved: no equivalent of Mary Lefkowitz has conducted a systematic analysis of the more 'literary' aspects of ancient artists' lives, nor attended in detail to their potential fictionality.³³ Moreover, despite the sophistication of recent approaches to the ancient genre of the 'creative life', we have yet to see a rigorous examination of the degree to which biographical texts about

artists might be read as part of a complex reception history within antiquity itself (as Barbara Graziosi has interpreted the lives of Homer, for example).³⁴

The anecdote as historical source

The weight of scholarship exerts such powerful influence over any attempt to access the lives of Greek artists that it is only possible to approach the texts themselves by peering through the many layers of intellectual tradition that veil them. In particular, the methodological problems raised by the biographical anecdote have preoccupied the discipline of art history since scholars of the Second Vienna School such as Hans Tietze and Julius von Schlosser turned their attention to the phenomenon of *Kunstliteratur* in the early 1900s.³⁵ For art history to be taken seriously as a field of intellectual inquiry parallel to classical archaeology, it needed to be founded on the rigorous philological and historical analysis of textual sources, amongst which artists' biographies formed an important category of evidence.³⁶ Understood primarily as literary artefacts that required careful criticism and historicization, such texts could make a valuable contribution to the study of both the visual arts and their historiography.³⁷ For von Schlosser, the formulaic aspects of artists' lives offered a means of distinguishing between what he termed *Kulturgeschichte* (the historical, material and cultural contexts within which artists work) and *Kunstgeschichte* (a history of individual styles and expressions, or 'creative personalities').³⁸ The anecdotal aspects of artists' biographies therefore operate according to the rules of the 'historical grammar' employed by their authors, and take a particular symbolic or 'typological' form depending on historiographical trends and the influence of other literary genres (such as the Renaissance novella, in the case of Vasari).³⁹ Despite this attention to the philological subtleties of artists' lives, however, von Schlosser's project was ultimately dedicated to identifying the influences of historical context in order to determine the degree of original expression attributable to individual artists; like parallel projects in classical archaeology,

it invited a separation of documentary and anecdotal components in order to prioritize histories of aesthetic production (or genesis) over cultural reception, validating the 'ideal and absolute position' of the artist as innovator.⁴⁰

One of the key 'typological' themes that von Schlosser identified in his discussion of Vasari's *Vite* is that of 'the discovery by the older artistic master of the young genius tending sheep', which features in Ghiberti and Vasari's lives of Giotto, as well as the lives of Andrea Castagno and even the nineteenth-century painter Giovanni Segantini.⁴¹ These cases of 'legendary repetition', which von Schlosser compares to 'repeating an impression from one and the same wood block' found their most sophisticated and influential analysis in a 1934 study by two of von Schlosser's students, Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, known to later Anglo-American readers as *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist*.⁴² Taking seriously von Schlosser's observation of 'how easily fables and legends grow up around art works', Kris and Kurz treated anecdotes such as 'the artist as shepherd boy' as transhistorical and transcultural myths relating to the psychology of artistic production and the uncanny power of the image, observing recurrent patterns in the lives of artists from classical antiquity to early modern Europe and beyond, including Nordic and Far Eastern traditions. In this sense, their model of the anecdote shares much with the formalism of Vladimir Propp's approach to the morphology of the Russian folktale (first published in 1928), which focused on the construction and repetition of discrete narrative units, or motifs.⁴³ Presented primarily as a 'sociological' study of the legend of the artist, Kris and Kurz's analysis moves away from the philological approach pioneered by von Schlosser in order to examine the structure, function, significance and appeal of the biographical anecdote, both in constructing a shared image of the artist's role in society (especially that of the artist as hero), and in influencing the *gelebte Vita* or 'enacted biography' of artists themselves.⁴⁴

In sidelining the question of historical authenticity in order to examine the formulaic aspects of biography (as well as the way artists actively engage in self-mythologization), Kris and

Kurz made a profoundly significant intervention in the study of the artist anecdote.⁴⁵ Here it is important to attend to the intellectual climate that gave birth to their project: both scholars were influential on their younger colleague Ernst Gombrich and had close affiliations with the Warburg Institute, while from 1933 Kris (who had personal connections to Freud) edited the journal *Imago* (which applied psychoanalysis to the arts), was a practising psychoanalyst and eventually became a prominent specialist in the psychology of propaganda.⁴⁶ As Gombrich writes in his memoir of Kris (to whom he attributes most of the conceptual thinking behind the project), aesthetics eventually became for him ‘a field of research in which certain general propositions of psychoanalysis could best be developed and illustrated’.⁴⁷ The Warburgian imbrication of ‘modern with mythical thinking’ that characterizes *The Legend of the Artist* highlights the compelling authority that biographical *topoi* carry as they move between texts, periods and genres, and shifts attention from histories of production to the social roles attributed to artists by those who attend to their work.⁴⁸ In short, it highlights the *constructedness* of the artist’s life – whether by self or others. In this sense, Kris and Kurz’s approach could be said to essay a compromise between conflicting models of historical determinism and individual genesis: while their sociological analysis of the ‘legend of the artist’ accounts for shifting trends in the conceptualization of artistic creativity (especially the post-Classical influence of a Judeo-Christian model of inspired genius), Kris’s particular focus on the psychological aspects of myth-making legitimates an exploration of universal psychic themes which shape both the collective mind and the creative acts of individuals. Here, he takes his lead from Freud’s analysis of the relationship between personal and collective forms of memory in his examination of the life of Leonardo da Vinci, which is discussed later in this volume by Miriam Leonard.⁴⁹

It is inevitable that this emphasis on what Gombrich called ‘a universal human response to the mysterious magic of image-making’ should encourage a radical decontextualization of the anecdote: viewed as ‘movable scenery inserted in the

biographer's workshop', to be borrowed when information was not at hand, biographical *topoi* are all too easily uncoupled from the visual and textual traditions that gave rise to them.⁵⁰ Indeed, although Greek sculptors and painters feature prominently in *The Legend of the Artist*, they are primarily treated as mythical archetypes that anticipate later biographical trends. The miraculous discovery of the young artist's talents exemplified in the life of Giotto, for example, has its roots in the case of Lysippus, who Pliny claims was inspired to teach himself sculpture when he heard the painter Eupompus claim that 'Nature herself' was his only model.⁵¹ For Kris and Kurz, this episode illustrates an ongoing tension in artists' biographies between the celebration of self-taught 'culture heroes' on the one hand, and a need for pedagogical genealogies on the other: 'Eupompus', whose name, they observe, literally means 'trustworthy guide', serves paradoxically to provide 'an ideal teacher for the genius of Lysippus, who grew up "without a teacher"'.⁵² Such penetrating observations reveal the deep structure of artist anecdotes: they alert us to the close relationship between artists' lives and narrative archetypes (such as the 'artist as magician'), as well as the ways in which anecdotes can address complex aspects of image-making (such as art's imitation of nature, or its power to dazzle and beguile). It is no accident that the mythical figure of Daedalus features prominently in Kris and Kurz's discussion, for the opportunities that his mythic cycle offers for thinking about image-making are not significantly different from those offered by 'historical' figures such as Lysippus.⁵³ However, the broad scope of Kris and Kurz's survey precludes close analysis of each anecdote's cultural and textual embeddedness: why, for example, does Pliny give such prominence to the idea of *natura* as a teacher and model in his account of Lysippus? Moreover, the concept of transferable *topoi* detaches artists' lives from the material objects that they crafted: what is it about Lysippus' sculptures, in particular, that made the concepts of autodidacticism and autopsy such critical themes within his biographical tradition?⁵⁴

The biographical anecdote thus occupies an ambiguous category within the range of information available to us about

ancient art. It purports to tell us something important about the social and cultural conditions under which identifiable artists produced their work, and even the specific skills and personality traits that shaped them, yet, despite its tenacity, the anecdote's historical status rests only on the evidence of its own telling. Unanchored by corroborative data and independent of the mass of unattributed artefacts that constitute the bulk of surviving archaeological material, the anecdote is reframed with every iteration, each time serving a particular literary and critical purpose.⁵⁵ Moreover, as Catherine Soussloff has argued, the very notion of the 'artist's life' needs to be historically situated, for the concept of the 'artist' is itself a product of art-historical methods retrospectively employed to explain the genesis of privileged objects within the cultures that produced them.⁵⁶ Just as Lefkowitz has observed how key features of poets' lives are derived from their poetry and then used to 'explain' that same poetry's coming-into-being, so Soussloff argues that primary traits attributed to artists (such as Lysippus' close observation of 'Nature herself') are 'just those intentions capable of artistic realization, or "expression" invested in the work of art'.⁵⁷ The 'artists' we encounter in biographical texts, then, are the product of cultural engagements with their works. By implication, any sustained attempt to understand the function and significance of artist anecdotes in antiquity should address not only the cultural conditions that gave birth to them, but also the specific literary contexts in which they were deployed. Why is it that anecdotes cluster around artists of the Classical period? What aspects of Classical art do biographical *topoi* seek to 'explain' to viewers and readers? When is the telling of anecdotes deployed as a critical response to such objects, and what 'work' does it do?

In search of artists' *lives*

While the historicity of the artist anecdote presents one set of methodological challenges, its relationship to the genre of biography presents yet another. One of the key problems that

we face in the case of Greek artists' lives is that of origins. While von Schlosser, Kris and Kurz primarily developed their arguments in response to early modern texts such as Vasari's *Vite*, which are fully fleshed out biographies (often, in cases such as Vasari's life of Michelangelo, of artists coeval with the author), nothing so complete survives from antiquity. At the same time, evidence for artists' lives has been examined quite separately from other genres of 'creative life' (such as those of poets and philosophers), primarily because it has been co-opted by the disciplines of archaeology and art history.⁵⁸ Here, the influence of Vasari's biographical model of art history is so pervasive that the existence of an equivalent set of texts in antiquity has often been taken for granted, and read through the lens of the *Vite*, despite the fact that most of our evidence is framed quite differently: Pliny's sequences of *protoi heuretai* may have influenced early modern art histories, for example, but only when extracted from the complex scientific and ethical preoccupations that comprise the *Natural History* as a whole.⁵⁹

Given that the biographical aspects of Pliny's text are interwoven with a plurality of themes and influences that draw upon a wide variety of written genres, their literary origins must be located amongst the diverse sources that he lists. While all of these are now irretrievably lost, their names and titles give us a tantalizing glimpse of a tradition scholars have been all too keen to identify as a form of proto-art history.⁶⁰ Jeremy Tanner has helpfully outlined how during the third century BC, treatises written by artists as demonstrations of their own *technê* (such as Polyclitus' *Canon* and Euphranor's *On Proportions and Colours*) gave way to broader analyses of technique, such as that of Xenokrates of Sicyon (c. 280–30), who was both a practising sculptor trained by one of the 'sons of Lysippos' and the author of studies of sculpture and painting.⁶¹ At the same time, we see the introduction of more narrative-driven historical syntheses (or compilations of sources) composed by authors identified with the Peripatetic tradition such as Duris (c. 340–260), the sometime tyrant of Samos and a possible pupil of Theophrastus. Duris' works *On*

Painting and *On Sculpture* may have had more in common with his thematic treatises (such as *On Tragedy*, *On Games* and *On Customs*) and biographical histories (such as his *Histories of Agathocles*) than the technical works that preceded him.⁶² It is Duris who is generally credited as Pliny's source for the more 'anecdotal' components of the *Natural History*, primarily because Pliny cites him in his account of the young Lysippus' encounter with Eupompus.⁶³ Between the technical expert and the biographer stands their contemporary Antigonos of Karystos, the author of works on bronze and marble sculpture, who may have been both a practising sculptor in bronze (for the Attalid court at Pergamon) and the author of works on paradoxography and epigraphy, as well as lives of philosophers.⁶⁴ As both an artist (his name attested in epigraphic evidence from Pergamon) and an intellectual (supposed to have studied with the philosopher Menedemos of Eretria), Antigonos has been reconstructed as a figure who bridges the gap between practical *technê* and literary *bios*, who repackages the formalist criticism of Xenokrates in a more biographical format accessible to a Hellenistic readership eager to acquire and demonstrate their visual erudition.⁶⁵

Unfortunately, this familiar 'history of art history' is constructed from very flimsy evidence. First, although enough fragments of Antigonos' other works survive (including some striking pen-portraits of philosophers) for Wilamowitz to have published a virtuoso account of his career in 1881, the art-historical works of all three authors have been lost.⁶⁶ Andrew Stewart's suggestion that Antigonos was 'the true prototype of the modern art historian' must therefore be taken with a pinch of salt; indeed, the biographer and art historian may well have been different 'Antigonoi' altogether.⁶⁷ Second, Duris' art-historical works are cited by ancient sources according to the titles *Peri Zographias* and *Peri Toreutikês* ('On Painting' and 'On Metalwork') and are not presented as biographies, in contrast to his works *Ta Peri Agathoclea* (on the Sicilian king Agathocles) and *Peri Euripidou kai Sophokleous* (on the two tragedians).⁶⁸ Rather, these titles suggest an emphasis on medium and technique – a focus on production, rather than

producers. Moreover, amongst his sources for Book 34 (on bronze sculpture), Pliny cites Duris together with Menaechmus, Xenocrates and Antigonos, identifying them all as the authors of works *de toreutice* with no discrimination between content, while Duris is not cited at all as a source for Book 35 (on painting), the book which has the highest concentration of anecdotal material.⁶⁹

In the urge to reconstruct Xenocrates as a professional critic and Duris as a popular biographer, then, the commentaries on Pliny's *Natural History* repeatedly enforce a distinction between what Tanner critiques as 'the "properly" aesthetic/art-historical components' of Pliny's project and its 'rhetorical, epigrammatic and "anecdotal" components'.⁷⁰ Such an approach encourages a misplaced confidence in the palimpsestic nature of Pliny's text, whereby it becomes possible to peel away the layers of influence in order to identify lost sources; so Stewart, for example, reads Pliny's account of a contest between the sculptors Agoracritus and Alcamenes (36.16–17) as combining Duris' biographical approach with the formalism of Xenokrates, filtered through a late third-century synthesis by Antigonos which was then paraphrased into Latin by Varro.⁷¹ This mode of reading is akin to the practice of *Kopienkritik*, whereby lost Greek 'originals' are reconstructed based on the evidence of later Roman copies, with scant attention paid to the historical and cultural framework within which the surviving artefacts were actually commissioned and viewed.⁷² Like the head or limb of a statue, the anecdote is excised from its extant literary *corpus* and reassigned to a text that is ultimately a work of the scholarly imagination. The piecemeal, scattered nature of what remains clouds the original literary function of artist anecdotes, permitting the fantasy of a set of foundational texts that conform to familiar categories of art criticism and biography. Indeed, it seems hardly accidental that Xenocrates the technician, Duris the biographer and Antigonos the artist-scholar correspond to the three central aspects of *Kunstliteratur* – reflections on theoretical principles, biographical narrative, and self-conscious historical synthesis – that von Schlosser identified

in the *Commentarii* of Lorenzo Ghiberti, whom he saw as ‘the first modern art historian’.⁷³

This urge to restore anecdotes to their *Ur*-texts not only disregards the literary contexts that have preserved them, but also assumes that they were once attached to more comprehensive biographies. Yet as Kris and Kurz so astutely observed, the anecdote need not function solely within a biographical frame, but constitutes ‘the primitive cell’ of biography, operating as a narrative unit that passes between texts, genres and even individual artists.⁷⁴ We have no secure evidence that the lives of ancient artists ever constituted more than discrete clusters of units, which congregated and fragmented as they moved between organisms. Such narrative ‘cells’ certainly contained within them the germs of a biographical genre, one which helped to inspire the artist-centred model of art history developed by Vasari and his successors. However, the Vasarian model of a fully-realized life has in turn been projected back onto the lost texts of antiquity, despite the lack of any reliable attestation that artists formed the subjects of collective *bioi* such as those devoted to other creative types, such as poets, orators and philosophers. It is noteworthy that artists seldom feature in the history of ancient biography (they are completely ignored by Momigliano, for example).⁷⁵ Nor do they appear amongst the serried ranks of portrait types familiar in Hellenistic and Roman art, which tend to focus on the same characters who form the subjects of biographies. If the genre of the ‘artist’s life’ ever existed at all, it did not endure beyond an initial flowering as the product of Hellenistic tastes for the construction of canons, chronicles and catalogues; indeed, it is striking that when Philostratus the Elder turned from biography to the visual arts, he did not compose a *Lives of the Painters* to accompany his *Lives of the Sophists* and *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, but emphatically rejected this option, stating in the proem to his *Imagines* that he will *not* ‘deal with painters nor yet with their lives’, but will focus instead upon the rhetorical act of description by selecting examples of paintings to make the subjects of speeches composed for the instruction of young pupils.⁷⁶ Crucially, the biographical evidence that we do have

for Classical artists owes its survival to predominantly non-biographical approaches to the structuring of art-historical knowledge.

Redefining the artist anecdote: narratives of making

If we dismantle the scholarly construct of the ‘artist’s life’ and contest the biographical origin of the anecdote, what might stand in their place? One approach we could take (and which I explore at greater length in a forthcoming book) is to attend more closely to the relationship between artist anecdotes and the objects of their handiwork. All ‘creative lives’, one might argue, serve to account for the genesis and salient qualities of works associated with their protagonists (as Mary Lefkowitz discusses in [Chapter 8](#)). In this sense, artist anecdotes share important parallels with other forms of ancient *bios*: Praxiteles’ relationship with Phryne, for example, posits an erotic attachment between artist and model as a means of rationalizing the strikingly naturalistic style of his Aphrodite at Knidos and the intense desire the statue aroused in its (male) viewers. As Barbara Graziosi has observed of the many ‘Lives of Homer’, ‘authors can themselves be objects of creative processes’, and this form of imaginative biographical response to cultural artefacts certainly applies to artists, too.⁷⁷ One of the defining features of the biographical anecdote is that, although it purports to tell us about the coming into being of familiar cultural artefacts, it is itself a product (or agent) of their reception. To respond appropriately to a canonical work of poetry, rhetoric or philosophy in antiquity was to construct a narrative about the conditions of its creation that was predominantly focused upon its creator. To tell stories about creative lives was ultimately to practise a form of critical interpretation. In the great debate over the existence of a concept of ‘Art’ in antiquity, it tells us something important about the cultural and institutional status of Classical sculptures and paintings in the Hellenistic and Roman world that artists, like poets and philosophers, were afforded a role in this cultural discourse. In this sense, artist anecdotes played

a significant role in antiquity's reception of the art of the fifth and fourth centuries BC; by contributing to the discourse of art consumption, they played a crucial role in the evolution of Classicism, offering a creative means of responding to and elaborating upon a well-established canon of familiar objects.

Significantly, however, the abbreviated biographical units that constitute artist anecdotes are predominantly concerned with the creative process itself. In this sense, they are less concerned with the notion of the artist's *bios* than with specific acts of genesis, which might be better understood as *narratives of making*. Here it is worth observing that Pliny's tale of Lysippus and Eupompus, so often cited within the later historiography of ancient art, is unique within the corpus of artist anecdotes that have survived from antiquity. While von Schlosser, Kris and Kurz were drawn to the episode because it offered a model of the artist's initiation into his life's vocation that anticipated the later *topos* of the artist's miraculous discovery of his talent (which Vasari associates with Giotto), we do not find equivalent moments in the lives of other Greek artists.⁷⁸ Rather, the early modern tradition looks back to the Hesiodic *topos* of miraculous initiation (or *Dichterweihe*), which is an important feature of the lives of Greek *poets*.⁷⁹ Indeed, in contrast to other biographical traditions, artist anecdotes rarely supply details about their protagonist's childhood, family, lifestyle or ultimate fate; nor does the sparse biographical information that survives in ancient texts allow for the reconstruction of the rich narrative arcs we find in later artists' lives, as schematized by Catherine Soussloff (see [Box 12.1](#) below).⁸⁰ Rather than supplying 'an account of the life of a man from birth to death' (as Momigliano defined biography), most of the artist anecdotes referred to by Pliny would fall into Soussloff's categories of 'Maturity' and 'Fate of Works', concerned as they are with the creation of famous sculptures and paintings, and, where appropriate, with the reception of these works in Pliny's Rome.⁸¹ This invites us to question whether such episodes are not in fact about the lives of *artists*, so much as the lives of *objects*.

Box 12.1 Schematic structure of the artist's biography

Table after Soussloff (1997)

Prebirth

Portents
Dreams
Signs in nature of an unusual type

Birth

Significance of place of birth
Family lineage
Naming

Youth

Signs of early promise in drawing or modeling
Discovery by a recognized artist or artistic authority
Recognition of abilities by teacher, fellow students (including competition among artists), patrons
Virtuosity in one or more media
Early works described

Maturity

Description of major commissions
Ekphrases of completed works in prominent locales or collections, including author's own

Old age

Descriptions of late works in terms of artist's spirituality

Death

Circumstances of death
Artist's preparations for death
Illustrious patrons and peers affected by death

Fate of body

Physical appearance and personal habits of artists
Burial, memorials, tombs, inscriptions

Fate of works

Artist's artistic lineage: students, schools, technical secrets
Significance of artist for author

If the form that biography takes in relation to ancient artists is reconceived as an abbreviated narrative of genesis, or a biography of the object, then the highly selective nature of artists' lives becomes less problematic. Given the relatively low social status of artists in antiquity (as opposed to in the Renaissance), their absence from the genres of biography and portraiture should not be surprising; sculptors, painters, gem-carvers and metal-chasers were after all *banausoi*, 'craftsmen' who lacked the status of elite intellectuals.⁸² Accordingly, artist anecdotes treat the wealth of figures such as Pheidias and Parrhasius as indicative of overweening pride, while we also read of Protogenes' genteel poverty, the anxiety of painters over the market value of their work, and the awkwardnesses of serving a patron, whether *demos* or king.⁸³ The artist's self-portrait, meanwhile, recurs as a subversive expression of hubris, as when Pheidias is charged with concealing his portrait within the Amazonomachy on the shield of the Athena Parthenos, or Parrhasius with painting the god Hermes with his own features.⁸⁴ Most frequently, we read of the process of *making* – the challenges posed by feats of representation (such as Timanthes' veiled Agamemnon or the multiple models employed for Zeuxis' *Helen*); competitions or exchanges of skill (such as the contests between Zeuxis and Parrhasius, or Alcamenes and Agoracritus); the development of specific techniques (such as Parrhasius' experiments with contour); and relationships between masters and pupils (Pheidias and Alcamenes), or artists and models (Praxiteles and Phryne).⁸⁵ This emphasis on making is in stark contrast to the lives of poets, which rarely focus on acts of composition (with the exception of Euripides, who is said to have written his plays in a cave by the sea).⁸⁶ As Lefkowitz has observed, 'Ancient biographies preserve no records of working arrangements . . . Poems are composed instantaneously or are recited when already completed; if a poet is seen in the process of working, it is in isolation'; as she discusses in this volume, the literary creative process is more often externalized through the motif of divine inspiration.⁸⁷ But antiquity, as Kristeller reminds us, 'knew no Muse of painting or of sculpture'.⁸⁸ The

contrast between verbal and material modes of production is neatly summed up by Lucian, whose narrator tells in *The Dream* of his decision to abandon his career as a sculptor's apprentice for life as an orator when a personification of *Paideia* tells him:

Even if you should become a Pheidias or a Polyclitus and should create many marvellous works, everyone will praise your skill for sure, but none of your admirers, if he had any sense, would want to be like you; for whoever you might become, you would still be considered a labourer, a man who lives by his hands and has nothing but his hands. (Lucian, *Somn.* 9, transl. Harmon (1921))⁸⁹

As narratives of *handiwork*, artist anecdotes thus cleave closely to material objects, even when (as in cases such as Zeuxis' grapes and Parrhasius' curtain), the artefacts they concern are such effective conceits that the historical existence of the object itself is arguably less important than the reader's visualization of its genesis. Like literary *ekphrasis*, narratives of making may be tied to real or fictional works of art; what matters is the emphasis that the text places upon the physical act of creation by an identifiable historical figure, and its reification of the process of *poiêsis*. Focused upon the 'first discoverers' of the fifth and fourth centuries BC, such narratives offered later authors a repertoire of verbo-visual conceits through which they could reflect on the creative process more broadly. It is not surprising, in this regard, that anecdotes such as Zeuxis' multiple models or Timanthes' struggles to depict the sacrifice of Iphigenia appear in rhetorical and literary treatises, where they provide their authors with visual illustrations of creative imitation and its limitations, so facilitating a meta-commentary on the nature of verbal *technê*.⁹⁰ Likewise, artists crop up in imaginary legal cases, where the controversial choices they make in the course of narratives of making (such as Parrhasius' torture of a slave in the pursuit of a convincingly mimetic *Prometheus*) invite rhetorical demonstrations of skill.⁹¹ It is not the artist's *bios* that is important in such contexts; rather, his wrestling with particular technical, aesthetic and ethical challenges in the act of creation provides

a model for thinking about *poiêsis* more broadly. The fact that such episodes take familiar forms which are repeated in different contexts and genres makes them all the more effective as conceptual ‘hooks’ on which to hang more extensive discourses, whether Pliny’s histories of making or Cicero and Quintilian’s guides to oratory. Here we might recall von Schlosser’s astute comment that biographical anecdotes are like multiple impressions ‘from one and the same wood block’: while related to a specific material object and carrying with them an *aetion* of its genesis and a memory of its form, anecdotes are infinitely replicable and transferable between media. In this sense, they mirror the culture of visual emulation and replication that characterized the material environments of their Hellenistic and Roman readers. Replicated as part of a culture of Classicism that was deeply invested in the transmission and replication of works by their protagonists, artist anecdotes are themselves preoccupied with the nature of imitation. As narratives of making, they offer readers and viewers the opportunity to witness and retrace a series of ‘first discoveries’ that play a foundational role in their own cultural heritage. At the same time, they also offer their authors a critical means of reflecting upon their own acts of genesis.

Notes

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- 1 For the catalogue, see Pasquier and Martinez (2007), with detailed reviews of the exhibition by Pioda (2007) and Stewart (2007). On Praxiteles’ oeuvre, see also Corso (1988–91) and (2004–10), Stewart (1990) 176–9, 277–81 and Kaltsas and Despinis (2007) (based on a similar exhibition in Athens).
- 2 As discussed by Pasquier (2007). The Mantinea base, which the exhibition included, once supported cult statues attributed to

- Praxiteles by Pausanias (8.9.1), but the statues are now lost and the base itself has been attributed to ‘lesser hands’, possibly those of Praxiteles’ workshop (Ajootian (1996) 122–3, Kosmopoulou (2002) 147–50). The Hermes and Dionysus from Olympia is now widely thought to be a later work (see Ridgway (1997) 261), though the Louvre’s curators preferred to leave the question open (Pasquier (2007) 97–103). Other pieces such as the Leconfield and Despinis Heads (both exhibited by the Louvre in 2007), the Marathon Boy and the Cleveland Apollo employ an identifiably ‘Praxitelean’ style, but cannot be attributed to the sculptor himself with any certainty: see Pasquier (2007) and Stewart (2007) 565–6.
- 3 The bases supported portraits of Kleiokrateia and her husband Spoudias (the latter probably by another artist), dedicated to Demeter and Kore (Agora I 4165, c. 360–350 BC) and Archippe, dedicated by her mother Archippe, probably from the Eleusinion (Agora I 4568, c. 350–325 BC): see Ajootian (1996) 95–7 and (2007), Tracy (2008) and Dillon (2010) 51–2.
 - 4 On the signing of ancient art, see Siebert (1978); Tanner (2006) 205–12; Osborne (2010); and Squire (2013); for epigraphic evidence for artists’ signatures, see Loewy (1885); Marcadé (1953–7); and Muller-Dufeu (2002). The challenges raised by attribution and the relationship between visual, epigraphic and literary evidence were explored in a 2007 exhibition in Berlin, published by Kansteiner *et al.* (2007).
 - 5 The ancient sources for Phryne’s relationship with Praxiteles are gathered by Overbeck (1868) nos. 1246, 1251, 1269–78; Raubitschek (1941); Pollitt (1990) 84–9; and Hallof *et al.* (2014) vol. III, nos. 1961–1973, and discussed by Havelock (1995) 39–54 and Rosenmeyer (2001). On the triangulated relationship between artist, lover and object in ancient culture, see Bettini (1999) esp. 259, on Praxiteles and Phryne. On the role of courtesans in ancient biography more broadly, see Henry (1995).
 - 6 http://mini-site.louvre.fr/praxitele/html/I.4.6_en.html. On the Phryne tradition and its relationship to the Knidian Aphrodite, see Havelock (1995) 42–7.
 - 7 On Phryne as a literary phenomenon, see Rosenmeyer (2001); McClure (2003); and Morales (2011).
 - 8 Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 13.590e = Hermippus fr. 68 K-A, Ps.-Plutarch, *Lives of the Ten Orators* 849c–e. On Phryne’s trial and its distortion in the biographical tradition, see Cooper (1995). Morales (2011) convincingly argues that anecdotes about the exposure of Phryne’s body ‘can be read as allegorical narratives about the creation and reception of art’ (72). On nineteenth-century depictions of Phryne, see Papet (2007).

- 9 See McClure (2003) 41 (who suggests that many of these may have been epideictic exercises rather than genuine prosecution speeches) and Rosenmeyer (2001).
- 10 On shifting concepts of portraiture, see Dillon (2006) 8–9. On the dangers of applying familiar artistic concepts to the visual culture of antiquity, see the essays gathered in Platt and Squire (2010).
- 11 On the Knidia's embodiment of these issues, see (from a vast bibliography), Osborne (1994); Havelock (1995); Salomon (1997); Stewart (1997) 96–105; Ridgway (2004) 713–25; and Platt (2011) 180–211.
- 12 On the relationship between voice, text and object in relation to ancient art, see Männlein-Robert (2007c).
- 13 I borrow this helpful distinction from Marvin (2008) 26. On Pliny, see below. On the disciplinary identity crisis of classical art history, which 'exists uneasily among the fields of art history, classics, and archaeology', see Neer (2010) 6–11; Donohue (2013) 1; and Squire (2015b) (with further bibliography).
- 14 On the biographical construction and naturalization of the figure of the artist in art historical discourse, see Soussloff (1997) (who begins her survey in the late fifteenth century). On Ghiberti, see von Schlosser (1912), with McHam (2013) 109–17, on his use of Pliny. On Vasari's ideology of the artist, see Rubin (1990) and (1995) esp. 411–12; Stack (2000); and Michelsen (2002), with Burioni (2010) on Vasari's approach to biography and the concept of *vita*. On a move away from biographical anecdote in art writing of the late seventeenth century (amidst tensions between the 'Ancients' and the 'Moderns'), see Hénin *et al.* (2012).
- 15 On the anonymous artists of the *Ara Pacis*, see Conlin (1997), with Toynbee (1951) and Squire (2015a) on Roman artists more generally. On the famously problematic case of Apollonios of Athens (who is nowhere mentioned in extant literary sources), see Haskell and Penny (1981) 311–14, with Vollkommer and Vollkommer-Glökler (2001) 71–2, s.v. Apollonios (VI).
- 16 The concept of a history of art without artists is indebted to Heinrich Wölfflin's doctrine of *Kunstgeschichte ohne Namen* (1915), discussed by Squire (2009) 79–87, as well as Alois Reigl's concept of *Kunstwollen* (1893, 1901), on which see Reichenberger (2003) and Elsner (2006).
- 17 On Winckelmann's historicism and its influence on later scholarship, see Pommier (1996) and Harloe (2013).
- 18 On the disciplinary history of *Meisterforschung* and the influence of Furtwangler (1893), see Pollitt (1996); Fullerton (2003); Strocka (2005); and Barbanera (2008), with (amongst a vast

- bibliography) Gazda (2002); Perry (2005); Junker and Stähli (2008); and Marvin (2008) on the concept of the Roman ‘copy’. On Beazley’s method, see Elsner (1990) (on the influence of Giovanni Morelli); Robertson (1991); Neer (1997); Whitley (1997); Boardman (2001) 128–38; and Rouet (2001). The problem of attribution is discussed by Palagia (2010), while Squire (2013) and (2015a) reviews the historiography of approaches to the ancient artist.
- 19 Carpenter (1960) (Preface); among Ridgway’s many publications, see especially (1981) and (1997), which focus on the Classical period. On the influence of Roland Barthes’ ‘Death of the Author’ on art history (Barthes (1977)), see Pollock (1980) and (1989) and Moxey (1994) 51–61, with Hurwit (1997) on classical antiquity.
- 20 The most influential examples of the ‘French School’s’ approach to vase-painting are Bérard (1984) and Lissarrague (1987). On Greco-Roman modes of viewing, see Elsner (1995) and (2007).
- 21 For exhibitions, see Beck *et al.* (1990) (on Polyclitus) and Moreno (1995) (on Lysippus), with Despinis (1971) (on Agoracritus); Stewart (1977) (on Scopas); Corso (1988–91) and (2004–10) (on Praxiteles); Davison and Waywell (2009) (on Pheidias); and Palagia and Pollitt (1996) (on personal styles). On individual hands in Cycladic sculpture, see Getz-Gentle (2001); for an attempt to identify individual painters and workshops in Pompeii, see Richardson (2000).
- 22 See Vollkommer and Vollkommer-Glökler (2001–04). For Junius’ *Catalogus architectorum, mechanicorum, sed praecipue pictorum, statuariorum, caelatorum, tornatorum aliorumque artificum*, see Junius, Aldrich *et al.* (1991) vol. II, with Marvin (2008) 30–3, who comments that ‘Junius’ *Catalogus* is biographical but not sequential, synchronic not diachronic, and comprehensive in its reach’ (33).
- 23 On decontextualization as an identifying feature of the anecdote, see Lecercle (2012) 11–12.
- 24 See e.g. Sellars (1896) on Pliny’s ‘Chapters on the History of Greek Art’. On the relationship between the ‘art historical’ aspects of the *Natural History* and the work’s broader themes, see Isager (1991); Rouveret (1995); Carey (2003); and Tanner (2006) 235–46. On Pliny’s (proto-) encyclopaedism, see Naas (2002), (2011) and (2013) (with Naas (2008) on Pliny’s concept of the *protôs heuretês*); Murphy (2004); Doody (2009) and (2013). See also Pauline A. LeVen, Chapter 11 on the role of *protot heuretai* in ancient histories of music.

- 25 On the Enlightenment model of the 'Fine Arts', see Kristeller (1990) with Squire (2010) 137–9; see too Pauline A. LeVen, Chapter 11.
- 26 Overbeck's original edition of 1868 was published in a revised edition in 1959. For *Der Neue Overbeck*, see Hallof *et al.* (2014). Overbeck's taxonomy is roughly followed by Pollitt (1990) (organized by artist within larger categories of period, followed by medium); and Part III of Stewart (1990).
- 27 On the problem of terminology, see Stewart (1979) 101–14; Rouveret (1996); Tanner (2006) esp. 12–19; Squire (2010); and Naas (2012b), together with Porter (2010) and Tanner (2010), who address the application of post-Enlightenment concepts of 'art' to antiquity, in response to Kristeller (1990) and Shiner (2001). On 'artisans' and workshops, see Hasaki (2012) and Kristensen and Poulsen (2012); on the social status of the artist more generally, see Calabi Limentani (1958) 9–60 and Squire (2015a). For a broader discussion of the issue of aesthetic value in antiquity, see Sluiter and Rosen (2012); on parallel problems in the definition of *mousikê/mousikos*, see Pauline A. Le Ven, Chapter 11.
- 28 On Praxiteles and Phryne, see above. Pheidias' crimes are first attested by Philochorus: see the scholion to Aristophanes' *Peace* 605 = *FGrH* 328 F121, with Jacoby's commentary *ad loc.*, Stewart (1990) vol. I, 258–9; Pernot (2011); and Platt (2011) 109–11.
- 29 Pliny *N.H.* 35.64–5: see e.g., Bryson (1984) 30–2; Bann (1989) 27–40; Carey (2003) 129–30; and Squire (2009) 386–9. On the enduring influence of the 'Zeuxis painting models' anecdote (Cicero, *de Inventione* 2.1–5; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Imitation* fr. VI), see Mansfield (2007), with Hénin *et al.* (2012) and McHam (2013) on the influence of the Plinian anecdotal tradition on the later history of art. For sophisticated analysis of Pliny's use of the artist anecdote, see most recently Naas (2012a) and (2012b).
- 30 Dati (1667), discussed by Marvin (2008) 34–5.
- 31 See Hénin *et al.* (2012) (focusing primarily on the reception of Pliny's anecdotal material in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries), especially Lecercle (2012) 9–12.
- 32 See Tanner (2006) 235–6 (and my discussion below). For a critique of parallel approaches to early modern artists' lives, see Barocchi (1984) and Rubin (1995) (on Vasari's *Vite*); Perini (1990) (on Carlo Cesare Malvasia's *Life of Guido Reni*); and Delbeke *et al.* (2006) 5–10 (on the lives of Bernini); the latter discuss a disconnection between artistic biography and literary culture in the discipline of Art History more broadly, on which

- see also Waschek (1996) 'Introduction: Vies d'artistes, une fiction?' and Hénin *et al.* (2012).
- 33 Lefkowitz (2012); (first edn 1981).
 - 34 Graziosi (2002). An important exception here is Jeremy Tanner, who examines the biographical evidence for Greek artists as part of a broader project on the social and cultural movements that prompted an interest in the history of the visual arts in the Hellenistic and Roman periods; see Tanner (1999) and (2006) 240–6, which follows up on some suggestive comments by Gordon (1979) 8. Tanner nevertheless relies on such anecdotes to make important observations about the social status and practices of artists during the Classical period. On the reception of Pliny's artist anecdotes in the early modern period, see Bert (2012) and McHam (2013).
 - 35 See Tietze (1913) and von Schlosser (1924), with Soussloff (1997) 100–6; Trimann (2008); and de Mambro Santos (2009).
 - 36 Vasari's *Vite*, for example, occupy the entirety of Book 5 of *Die Kunstliteratur*, while von Schlosser dedicated the best part of his career to the writings of Lorenzo Ghiberti.
 - 37 Delbeke, Levy and Ostrow (2006) 5–6; Wolfgang Kallab's work on Vasari (edited by von Schlosser) exemplifies such an approach (Kallab (1908)); see also von Schlosser's (2010 [1924]) discussion of Vasari, which pays particular attention to the influence of Roman historiography and Renaissance historical fiction on his approach to biography.
 - 38 On this distinction, and its foundation in the idealist aesthetics of Benedetto Croce, see de Mambro Santos (2009).
 - 39 von Schlosser (2010 [1924]) esp. 20–4.
 - 40 Soussloff (1997) 101; see also Podro (1984). This approach is most explicitly put forth in von Schlosser (1929).
 - 41 von Schlosser (2010 [1924]) 23–4. On anecdotes about poets' initiations into their craft see Mary Lefkowitz, Chapter 8.
 - 42 von Schlosser (2010 [1924]) 23; Kris and Kurz (1934); (revised and translated, 1979), originally published as *Die Legende vom Künstler: ein geschichtlicher Versuch*.
 - 43 Propp (1958 [1928]). The possibility of this connection is raised by Soussloff (1997) 97–8. On parallels between Viennese and Russian approaches to art history in the first half of the twentieth century, see Rhineland (1974) and Azatyan (2009). I am grateful to Jaś Elsner for bringing this to my attention.
 - 44 See Gombrich (1984) 226 and Levy (2013) 218.
 - 45 See Levy (2013), who reads the book's emphasis on the 'artist-hero' as a coded response to Hitler's self-mythologization as an artist-leader in *Mein Kampf*. On a self-conscious reluctance to

- interrogate the veracity of anecdotes within the art historical tradition, see Lecercle (2012) (who comments, 'elle n'en atteste pas moins qu'on y a cru et qu'on invite à y croire' ('it shows only what was believed, and what we are invited to believe'), 10).
- 46 Freud's use of ancient biographical models (and his relationship to Kris and Kurz) is discussed in more detail by Miriam Leonard, Chapter 13. Note that Kris also published a commentary on *The Legend of the Artist* in *Imago* that was specifically aimed at psychoanalysts (Kris (1935), translated in Kris (1952) 64–84). On the intellectual and political contexts that gave birth to the project, see Gombrich's preface to Kris and Kurz (1979) ix–xiv, together with Soussloff (1997) 94–137, who notes the influence of Freud's study of Leonardo da Vinci (see Freud (1961b) and Miriam Leonard, Chapter 13), and Levy (2013).
- 47 Gombrich (1982) 230.
- 48 See Krüger (2011) and Levy (2013) 216, on Ernst Cassirer's model of 'mythical thinking' (1925), which is explicitly evoked by Kris and Kurz (1979) 21.
- 49 Freud (1961b) = *SE* XI: 59–137, discussed by Andersen (2001) and Orrells (2011) 237–65.
- 50 Kris and Kurz (1979) 33. On decontextualization as an identifying feature of the artist anecdote, see Lecercle (2012).
- 51 Pliny, *N.H.* 34.61; Kris and Kurz (1979) 14–38.
- 52 Kris and Kurz (1979) 20.
- 53 Kris and Kurz (1979) 66–71. On the significance of the Daedalus myth within antiquity, see Morris (1992) and Barbanera (2013) (part of a larger product on 'The Invention of the Artist in Ancient Greece').
- 54 For a more contextualized reading of the specifically Stoic role attributed to *natura* in Pliny's conception of art history, see Isager (1991) 32–47 and Tanner (2006) 242–6, with Beagon (1990) and Wallace-Hadrill (1990), on the broader significance of *natura* in the *N.H.* On the Hellenistic conception of Lysippus as the practitioner of a realist 'truth in sculpture', see Stewart (2005).
- 55 On the artist anecdote as a critical device open to continual reiteration and recontextualization, see Perini (1990); Lecercle (2012); and Hénin (2012).
- 56 Soussloff (1997).
- 57 Lefkowitz (2012); Soussloff (1997) 14.
- 58 On the isolation of artists' lives from other genres of biography, see Soussloff (1997) 26–7.
- 59 For Pliny's influence on Vasari, see Becatti (1972); Rouveret (1995) 58–60; Barkan (1999) 65–117, and on early modern art

- treatises more broadly, McHam (2013). Books 34–6 of the *N.H.* have been traditionally studied in isolation as a separate work of ‘Art History’: see e.g. Sellers (1896).
- 60 See e.g. Sellers (1896), with Isager (1991); Rouveret (1995); and Naas (2012b).
- 61 See Tanner (2006) 212–19, with fragments from texts other than Pliny collected in Ulrichs (1887). Xenokrates was supposedly trained by Tisikrates or Euthykrates, a ‘son of Lysippos’ active c. 280–230 BC: see Schweitzer (1932); Rouveret (1995); and Settis (1995).
- 62 On Duris, who is predominantly cited for his *Makedonika* (Macedonian Histories), see *BNJ* 76 (Duris of Samos), with Ulrichs (1887) 21–9; Kebric (1977); and Pédech (1989) 257–389.
- 63 *N.H.* 34.61: see e.g. Sellers (1896) xli–lxvii, whose detection of Duris’ influence in Pliny is an elaborate exercise in historiographical fiction. Plutarch, *Pericles* 28, comments that ‘Duris does not usually keep his narrative based upon the truth even in the absence of material that affects him directly’ (*BNJ* 76 T8); on this critical response to Duris, which has had a disproportionate influence on the notion of his ‘anecdotal’ approach to art history, see Landucci Gattinoni (1997) 44–5.
- 64 See Ulrichs (1887) 33–45; Wilamowitz (1965 [1881]); Dorandi (1999) (with further bibliography); Vollkommer and Vollkommer-Glökler (2001) 52–3; and Hägg (2012) 89–92.
- 65 See e.g. Pollitt (1974) 9–72; Stewart (1990) 27, 303.
- 66 Wilamowitz (1965 [1881]). On the difficulties of recovering and analysing Hellenistic biographical texts, see Hägg (2012) 67–98. On Wilamowitz’ own historiographical investment in the intellectual value of biography, see Constanze Güthenke, Chapter 2.
- 67 Stewart (1990) 303. For the suggestion that Antigonos the sculptor and Antigonos the pupil of Menedemos were separate individuals, see Andreae (1990) 67–9 and Tanner (2006) 214.
- 68 See *BNJ* 76, T 12 D (*de toreutice*), F 31 (*peri zôgraphias*), F 16–21 (*ta peri Agathoklea*), F 29 (*peri Euripidou kai Sophokleous*). Note that F 31 (Diogenes Laertius 1.38) is cited by Sellers (1896) xlvii as *περὶ ζωγράφων*, ‘On Painters’; for her, Duris is ‘an accomplished master of dramatic anecdote’.
- 69 Note that although *toreutikos* technically implies chased metalwork, or repoussé, the Latin *toreutice* is broader, suggesting sculpture in general, as opposed to *graphice*, ‘painting’ (see *LSJ* s.v. *τορευτικός*).
- 70 See Tanner (2006) 240, where he observes that following Schweitzer (1932) 47–52, the Budé edition of Book 34 (Le Bonniec and

- Gallet de Santerre (1953)) identifies the relics of an ‘authentic’ art-historical tradition attributed to Xenocrates and Antigonos, while attributing ‘anecdotal’ material to Duris. Likewise, Pollitt draws a distinction between ‘professional’ and ‘popular’ criticism, the latter exemplified by Duris, and driven by ‘the unquestioning acceptance of naturalism as the goal of art ... and an interest in the role of chance and the miraculous’ (Pollitt (1974) 9–72; (1990) 6–7); this distinction is echoed by Hardiman (2012). For a careful deconstruction of this binary distinction, see also Naas (2012a) and (2012b).
- 71 Stewart (1990) 21, 269–70, 291. Note that the only source Pliny explicitly acknowledges here is Varro, and then only to report that he favoured Agoracritus’ Nemesis of Rhamnous ‘above all other statues’.
- 72 On *Kopienkritik* and *Meisterforschung*, see above n. 18.
- 73 ‘Der erste Moderne Geschichteschreiber der Bildkunst’: von Schlosser (1912) 202, as discussed by Soussloff (1997) 103–6.
- 74 Kris and Kurz (1979) 131. Compare Lecercle (2012), who describes the artist anecdote as ‘un morceau de réalité’ (10) which operates as both a ‘symptom’ and an *exemplum*, allowing for the identification of general patterns based on analysis of particular conditions: as such, it is both memorable and reiterable.
- 75 Momigliano (1971); (1993); neither do artists feature in Hägg (2012) (who discusses Antigonos’ *Lives* of philosophers briefly at 89–92).
- 76 Philostratus, *Imagines*, proem 3: ὁ λόγος δὲ οὐ περὶ ζωγράφων οὐδ’ ἱστορίας αὐτῶν νῦν, ἀλλ’ εἶδη ζωγραφίας ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὁμιλίας αὐτὰ τοῖς νέοις ξυντιθέντες.
- 77 Graziosi (2002) 8.
- 78 On the significance of early life experiences for psychoanalytical approaches to biography, see Miriam Leonard, Chapter 13.
- 79 See Kambylis (1965); Murray (1981); Platt (2011) 50–5; and Lefkowitz (2012) 7–8, 62, 71, 88, 129. On the appropriation of motifs from early modern *Lives* of poets for early modern *Lives* of artists (particularly the moments of birth and naming), see Soussloff (1990). Cf. Mary Lefkowitz, Chapter 8, on a parallel anecdote about Plato’s decision to become a philosopher rather than a poet when he witnessed Socrates speaking in the Theatre of Dionysus (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 3.4–6).
- 80 Soussloff (1997) 2, discussed at 32–4.
- 81 Momigliano (1993) 11. See, e.g., 34.62–3, on Lysippus’ *Apoxyomenos* and *Alexander*; 35.81–3, on Apelles and Protogenes’ famous painting of *The Lines*; and 35.91, on Apelles’ *Aphrodite Anadyomene*.

- 82 See above, n. 25, together with Kristeller (1990) 166–71. On the self-conscious visual negotiation of the artist’s status in Attic vase-painting, see Neer (2002) 87–134.
- 83 Pheidias: *FGrH* 328 F 121 (Philochorus), Diodorus Siculus 12.39–40, Seneca *Controversiae* 8.2, Plutarch, *Pericles* 31.2–3, with Platt (2011) 108–10. Parrhasius: Pliny *N.H.* 35.71 (see also 35.62, on Zeuxis), Aelian *V.H.* 9.11 and Athenaeus 543f, with Morales (1996) on Parrhasius as a figure of excess. Protogenes: Pliny *N.H.* 35.101–2, with Carey (2003) 102–5 and Tanner (2006) 175. On the value of artworks, see e.g. Pliny *N.H.* 35.62, 88 and 112. On artists and patrons, see e.g. Aelian *V.H.* 2.3, Pliny *N.H.* 35.85–6 and Plutarch, *Alexander* (on Apelles and Alexander) and Plutarch, *Pericles* 13, 31–2 (on Pheidias, Pericles and Athens).
- 84 Pheidias: Ps-Aristotle *De mundo* 6 (= 399b–400a), Cicero, *Tusc.* 1.15.34, Valerius Maximus 8.14.6, Apuleius *De mundo* 32, Plutarch, *Pericles* 31.4: see Preishshofen (1974); Steiner (2001) 269; and Platt (2011) 108–9. Parrhasius: Themistius *Or* 2.29c: see Platt (2006) 267–70.
- 85 On Timanthes’ *Sacrifice of Iphigenia* (Cicero, *Orator* 74; Valerius Maximus 8.11.ext.6; Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* 2.13.12–13; Pliny, *N.H.* 35.74), see Platt (2014). On technical experimentation, see e.g. Pliny *N.H.* 35.67–9 (on Parrhasius), 35.85 (on Apelles) and 35.103 (on Protogenes). For a helpful taxonomy of artist anecdotes in Pliny, see Naas (2012b).
- 86 Euripides: *TrGF* 5.1, T 1 III.1: see Lefkowitz (2012) 95, who interprets the anecdote as a means of explaining ‘why so many of Euripides’ most beautiful lyrics describe the sea’. See also Johanna Hanink, Chapter 6.
- 87 Quotation from Lefkowitz (1981) x.
- 88 Kristeller (1990) 174, discussed by Squire (2010) 139.
- 89 See Romm (1990); Muller-Dufeu (2011) 65–92; and Squire (2013) 386–7.
- 90 See also Platt (2014).
- 91 See e.g. Seneca the Elder, *Controversia* 10.5, with discussion by Morales (1996). See also Pernot (2011), who discusses rhetorical fictionalizations of the trial of Pheidias, such as Seneca, *Controversia* 8.2.

CHAPTER 13

FREUD AND THE BIOGRAPHY OF ANTIQUITY

MIRIAM LEONARD

‘There is’, Sigmund Freud tells us in his psychobiography of the great artist, ‘only one place in his scientific notebooks where Leonardo [da Vinci] inserts a piece of information about his childhood’.¹ In the course of a discussion of the mechanics of the flight of vultures, Leonardo interjects this anecdote:

It seems that I was always destined to be so deeply concerned with vultures; for I recall as one of my very earliest memories that while I was in my cradle a vulture came down to me, and opened my mouth with its tail, and struck me many times with its tail against my lips.²

This single and fleeting vista onto the childhood of Leonardo acts for Freud as a key to unlocking what Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz will call ‘the riddle of the artist’.³ As Freud writes at the start of his biographical sketch: ‘Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) was admired even by his contemporaries as one of the greatest men of the Italian renaissance; yet in their time he had already begun to seem an enigma, just as he does to us to-day’.⁴ It is hardly surprising that Freud, whose biography of the artist is billed from its opening phrase as a piece of ‘psychiatric research’, should be concerned with Leonardo’s childhood. But in this case it is not merely Freud but Leonardo himself who sees this childhood memory as key to understanding the obsessions of the mature artist: ‘it seems I was always destined to be so deeply concerned ...’. The anecdote related to Leonardo’s creative awakening does not arise from a retrospective account of his life written by one of his admirers but instead forms part of his own autobiographical musings.

Childhood, as Kris and Kurz observe, forms a privileged site in the construction of the artist’s biography. In analysing a

succession of ancient and early modern stories recounted in the biographical traditions of artists, Kris and Kurz discern a universal pattern which ultimately gives rise to the 'heroization of the artist'. In a pattern which Leonardo evidently follows, an event from early childhood is seen to hold the key to understanding later greatness. With its explicit debt to psychoanalysis, Kris and Kurz's study draws attention not only to Freud's impact on the study of biography more generally but also to the important role that the biographies of antiquity would play in Freud's account of individual and collective lives. They openly take their cue from Freud when they argue that: 'the universal interest in everything reported about the childhood and youth of exceptional persons has deep roots in the human mind'.⁵ In Kris and Kurz's discussion, it is the universality of this pattern which, in part, prevents one from regarding these stories as straightforwardly factual. Although all anecdotes associated with the life of the artist may be marked by their fictionality, it is the ones which relate to the birth or early childhood of creative figures which are perhaps treated with the greatest suspicion.

For Freud, it is the nature of childhood memory, as such, which calls for scepticism. So he writes of Leonardo's tale: 'what we have here is a childhood memory; and certainly one of the strangest sort. It is strange on account of its content and on account of the age to which it is assigned.'⁶ Freud raises doubts about the possibility of being able to recollect a memory which goes back to one's 'suckling period' but he is even more doubtful about the veracity of this particular tale: 'What Leonardo asserts . . . sounds so improbable, so fabulous, that another view of it, which at a single stroke puts an end to both difficulties, has more to commend it to our judgement'.⁷ The content of Leonardo's memory is so elaborate in its improbability, so blatant in its fictionality that it cannot be understood as a *mere* memory: 'On this view the scene with the vulture would not be a memory of Leonardo's but a phantasy, which he formed at a later date and transposed to his childhood'.⁸

By the time that he wrote his account of Leonardo in 1910, Freud had already thought a great deal about the nature of

childhood memories. Already in 1899 Freud had written an essay entitled 'Screen Memories' which he elaborated in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901).⁹ The content of 'screen memories' seemingly relates to early childhood but what this content conceals is a traumatic mental experience which has occurred later in life. It is this retroactive dimension of such memories which proves crucial to unveiling their real psychological importance. In the *Psychopathology*, Freud constructs his analysis of screen memories around an example drawn from his own biography: a memory of standing and screaming in front of a cupboard door held open by his elder half-brother just as his mother walked in. It is the triviality of this screen memory (a character that Freud explains is a feature of many screen memories) which stands out in contrast to Leonardo's fantastical story. But while Freud's own memory is firmly rooted in the psychopathology of everyday life, it does not prevent him from gesturing towards the mythical quality of such memories:

One is thus forced by various considerations to suspect that in the so-called earliest childhood memories we possess not the genuine memory-trace but a later revision of it, a revision which may have been subjected to the influences of a variety of later psychical forces. Thus the 'childhood memories' of individuals come in general to acquire the significance of 'screen memories' and in doing so offer an analogy with the childhood memories that a nation preserves in its store of legends and myths.¹⁰

Through this enigmatic statement Freud constructs an analogy between the individual child and the childhood of humanity writ large. What the 'screen memory' of the cupboard door is to the young Sigmund, the myth of Romulus and Remus, say, might be to the Roman nation. The search for this kind of analogy between the individual case history and the history of mankind is one which pervades many of Freud's texts.¹¹

But it is in the Leonardo essay that Freud expands on the particular analogy between childhood memories and national histories most extensively:

Quite unlike conscious memories from the time of maturity, they [childhood memories] are not fixed at the moment of being experienced and afterwards

repeated, but are only elicited at a later age when childhood is already past; in the process they are altered and falsified, and put in the service of later trends, so that generally speaking they cannot be sharply distinguished from phantasies. Their nature is perhaps best illustrated by a comparison with the way in which the writing of history originated among the people of antiquity.¹²

Freud argues that rather than being fixed and experienced at the moment of origin, childhood memories are only experienced retrospectively in (relative) maturity and are thus subject to the distortions of later thought processes and desires. To follow the kind of archaeological metaphor that Freud was fond of employing, the recovery of childhood memories does not involve the excavation of a historical object fixed in time, rather the process of discovery creates the very object of its quest. Childhood memories are the product of later rationalisations rather than the inert traces of past experience. The analogy with historical writing might at first sight, then, seem to stress the unreliability of historical accounts because of their non-contemporaneity with the events they narrate. The historian's account is subject to distortion because it is influenced by the pressures of his/her own day.

As he develops his argument, however, Freud seems to have something else in mind:

As long as a nation was small and weak it gave no thought to the writing of history. Men tilled the soil of their land, fought for their existence against their neighbours, and tried to gain territory from them to acquire wealth. It was an age of heroes, not of historians. Then came another age, an age of reflection: men felt themselves to be rich and powerful, and now felt the need to learn where they had come from and how they had developed. Historical writing, which had begun to keep a continuous record of the present, now also cast a glance back on the past, gathered traditions and legends, interpreted the traces of antiquity that survived in customs and usages and in this way created a history of the past.¹³

More than pointing out the shortcomings of historical accounts, Freud is interested in the motivation behind the development of the historical record. Small and weak nations have no interest in history: they are too caught up in the struggle for survival to give any thought to commemoration. Freud paradoxically

names this period the 'age of heroes' and argues that historians are the symptoms of an age which has outlived heroism. Those who can, do; those who can't write history. The age of the historians may be 'powerful and rich' but it is also an age which had lost its agency, its essential connection to the here and now. Historical writing is no longer a way of celebrating the living achievements of the nation; it has become a vehicle for the invention of tradition:¹⁴

It was inevitable that this early history should have been an expression of present beliefs and wishes rather than a true picture of the past; for many things had been dropped from the nation's memory, while others were distorted, and some remains of the past were given a wrong interpretation in order to fit in with contemporary ideas. Moreover people's motive for writing history was not objective curiosity but a desire to influence their contemporaries, to encourage and inspire them, or to hold a mirror up before them. A man's conscious memory of events of his maturity is in every way comparable to the first kind of historical writing [which was a chronicle of current events]; while the memories that he has of his childhood correspond, as far as their origins and reliability are concerned, to the history of a nation's earliest days, which was compiled later and for tendentious reasons.¹⁵

In singling out early historians for their lack of interest in giving a true picture of the past, Freud anticipates a later argument about historical writing which he makes in *Moses and Monotheism*: 'the people who had come from Egypt brought writing and the desire to write history along with them; but it was to be a long time before historical writing realized that it was pledged to unswerving truthfulness'.¹⁶ As Richard Armstrong and others have shown, 'psychoanalysis was born in dialogue with the larger considerations of historical consciousness from the nineteenth century'.¹⁷ More specifically, Armstrong has demonstrated how Freud developed his analytic model in dialogue with Barthold Niebuhr's investigation of Livy's early history of Rome. Livy wrote his monumental account of the origins of the Roman Republic at the height of the constitutional reforms of Augustus. He was separated from his material not only by a significant temporal disjuncture, but also by a profound shift in ideological orientation. In writing his own critical history of Rome, Niebuhr

would expose the fictionality of Livy's account and reveal how the legends answered the needs of the new nation rather than exposed the historical truth of the origins of Rome. Thus Niebuhr writes of a notorious passage from Book 1 of Livy's history where the monstrous Tullia rides over her father's mutilated corpse in her carriage: 'Tullia's crimes may be no less imaginary than those of Lady Macbeth'.¹⁸ This rationalising account of Roman history would have a profound effect on the development of both secular and religious historiography in the nineteenth century. 'What Niebuhr and Grote achieved for ancient history', writes Simon Goldhill, 'Strauss and Renan achieved for the biblical accounts: a critical Thucydidean intellectualism that challenged the status of stories, a belief in which was central to personal religious identity'.¹⁹

Freud was clearly attracted to this early nineteenth-century hermeneutics of suspicion and the extent to which he saw a parallel with the work of analysis becomes manifest in his later *Autobiographical Study* (1925). There he would analogise one of the key developments in his thinking, namely the abandonment of the 'seduction theory', to the application of critical history:

When I had pulled myself together, I was able to draw the right conclusions from my discovery: namely that the neurotic symptoms were not related directly to actual events but to wishful phantasies, and that as far as neurosis was concerned, psychological reality was of more importance than material reality . . . It will be seen, then, that my mistake was of the same kind as would be made by someone who believed that the legendary story of the early kings of Rome (as told by Livy) was historical truth instead of what in fact it is – a reaction against the memory of times and circumstances that were insignificant and occasionally, perhaps, inglorious.²⁰

As Armstrong writes: 'When it comes to origins, we remember what we want to remember – this was the troubling assertion that Niebuhr raised to a methodological principle'.²¹ Niebuhr's critical history provided a model for Freud's analyses of childhood memory, which would in turn influence his understanding of historical questions such as the role of Moses in the development of Jewish monotheism.

But in the account of historical writing that Freud develops in *Moses and Monotheism* it is clear that distortion, fantasy

and repression are all integral to the 'desire to write history' as such: fantasy is, in other words, a constitutive part of the development of historical writing. In the *Leonardo* passage too, we see him identify the motivation to write history not in 'objective curiosity' but in some other need or desire. Yet, Freud wishes to maintain a distinction between earlier and later historical accounts in order to uphold the parallel with childhood and later memories. Childhood memories remain tendentious while the conscious memories of maturity produce a truer account of events.

Leonardo's story may parade its unreliability but it is merely an extreme example of a more general tendency of childhood memories. Rather than dismiss Leonardo's tale for its lack of authenticity, however, Freud instead uses it as an opportunity to illustrate the importance of fantasy:

Yet in underrating this story one would be committing just as great an injustice as if one were carelessly to reject the body of legends, traditions and interpretations found in a nation's early history. In spite of all the distortions and misunderstandings, they still represent the reality of the past: they are what a people forms out of their experience of its early days and under the dominance of motives that were once powerful and still operate today; and if it were only possible, a knowledge of all the forces at work, to undo these distortions, there would be no difficulty in disclosing the historical truth lying behind the legendary material. The same holds good for childhood memories or phantasies of the individual. What someone thinks he remembers from his childhood is not a matter of indifference; as a rule the residual memories – which he himself does not understand – cloak priceless pieces of evidence about the most important features in his mental development.²²

Freud carries the analogy through by claiming that Leonardo's story should hold the same prestige in relation to his mature development as Livy's historical account does in relation to the development of imperial Rome. In particular, although he seemingly draws a contrast between the unreliable motivations of the early historians/childhood memories and the purer objectivity of later historical accounts/adult memories, he nevertheless acknowledges that the very 'motives' which distorted the earlier stories are still operative today. No account is therefore neutral and fantasy continues to be a guiding

principle in the self-understanding of both the developed nation and the mature adult. In fact, rather than hold a lesser status, the more explicitly fantastical childhood memories turn out to be 'priceless'. It is as if the blatant fictionality of the anecdote offers the more privileged access to the identity of the nation or the mental development of the individual. Through the distorted fantasy of childhood, rather than through the objective, conscious memory of maturity, can the riddle of the artist be solved.

But if Freud makes the salience of Leonardo's suspect anecdote per lucidly clear, what function does the analogy between childhood memory and early historical writing perform for him? Throughout the development of psychoanalysis Freud had been interested in exploring the connections between individual and collective psychology. During his lifetime, he would often narrate the history of psychoanalysis in terms of its progression from self-analysis to the analysis of culture more broadly. Thus he wrote in a letter to Romain Rolland in 1936:

You know that the aim of my scientific work was to throw light upon unusual, abnormal or pathological manifestations of the mind – that is to say, to trace them back to the psychical forces operating behind them and to indicate the mechanisms at work. I began by attempting this upon myself and then went on to apply it to other people and finally, by a bold extension, to the human race as a whole.²³

The trajectory that Freud maps out for psychoanalysis from its beginnings in self-analysis to its *telos* by 'bold extension' to the analysis of 'the human race as whole', is a familiar one. Such a teleological account could certainly be mapped onto his works. If we take the *Interpretations of Dreams* (1900) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) as the bookends of Freud's psychoanalytic *oeuvre*, we could see a move from a work explicitly based in self-analysis in the wake of his father's death to a book which from its opening phrase announces its aspiration to analyse the Jewish people as a whole. The major works which deal most explicitly with cultural and historical topics, *Totem and Taboo* (1913), *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930), *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), are concentrated in the second half of

his career and have a quite different focus to the *Studies in Hysteria* (1895). But as the example of the discussion of screen memories from the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901/1907) shows, Freud had long been interested in thinking about individual psychology in relation to larger cultural and historical movements. As we saw, the analogy between childhood memories and the development of national histories was not a casual embellishment but rather a theme that Freud would return to compulsively. The single sentence in the *Psychopathology* becomes a several page exploration in *Leonardo* and would later arguably underpin the whole argument of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*.

Freud not only frequently punctuated his texts with these analogies, he also had a methodological interest in exploring his own recourse to analogical thinking. This is perhaps most evident in the well-known passage from *Civilisation and its Discontents* where Freud again returns to Rome to explore the nature of human memory. As in the earlier passages we have been exploring, Freud is concerned with the question of the preservation and forgetting of memories. He introduces the analogy in a manner which has some striking similarities to the *Leonardo* passage:

Since we overcame the error of supposing that the forgetting we are familiar with signified a destruction of the memory-trace – that is, its annihilation – we have been inclined to take the opposite view, that in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish – that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances . . . it can once more be brought to light. Let us grasp what this assumption involves by taking an analogy from another field. We will choose as an example the history of the Eternal City.²⁴

Despite the continued focus on early memory, it is clear that Freud's thinking has to some extent moved on. Where *Leonardo* seems to suggest that early childhood memories are inaccessible to the adult mind, this passage puts an emphasis on the recoverability of even the most remote of childhood memories. This is, presumably, the reason why Freud again chooses Rome as his analogy; it highlights how even the most ancient memories – memories, for instance, of an infant at his

suckling stage – live on in the adult mind, even if they exist in distorted form:

Now let us, by flight of imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past – an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one. This would mean that in Rome the palaces of the Caesars and the Septizonium of Septimius Severus would still be rising to their old height on the Palatine and that the castle of S. Angelo would still carry on its battlements the beautiful statues which graced it until the siege by the Goths, and so on.²⁵

But almost as interesting as the elaborate and visually arresting parallel which Freud creates is its seemingly immediate disavowal. At the end of his description of Rome, Freud abruptly interjects: ‘there is clearly no point in spinning our phantasy any further, for it leads to things that are unimaginable and even absurd’.²⁶ Freud first of all has anxieties about the possibility of mapping historical sequence onto a spatial plane but he then specifically worries about the boldness of creating an equivalence between a psychical entity and such an explicitly cultural and historical construct: ‘The question may be raised why we chose precisely the past of a *city* to compare with the past of a *mind*’.²⁷ With uncharacteristic humility Freud concludes: ‘we bow to this objection; and abandoning our attempt to draw a striking contrast, we will turn instead to what is after all a more closely related object of comparison – the body of an animal or a human being’.²⁸ Freud seems to retreat from the realm of culture and history and return to the comfort of anatomy and biology. The individual human is thus best understood in relation to his bodily rather than his cultural and historical existence.

Although Freud’s medical training and unswerving commitment to the scientificity of psychoanalysis made him reluctant to actively celebrate the more humanistic aspects of his methodology, it is clear that culture and history formed an integral part of his project from the outset. More specifically, as all the analogies we have explored suggest, antiquity occupied a privileged place in Freud’s thought. As many recent studies have

shown, antiquity played a crucial role in the formulation of Freud's own theories.²⁹ As the references to Niebuhr's history indicate, Freud was profoundly indebted to approaches derived from classical philology. Jacques le Rider has argued that 'one can define psychoanalysis as an archaeology of the unconscious whose method was conceived on the model of philology'.³⁰ Perhaps, even more significantly, Freud placed the biographies of figures from antiquity at the core of his exploration of the human psyche. So even in the book most associated with his own self-analysis, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud is drawn to the store of ancient legend. His observation that we are all Oedipus inserted an ancient figure and his life into the narrative of all our biographies, starting with his own. Freud modelled the analysis of all lives on the specific experiences of a fictional character from antiquity. Moreover, in the examples that we have been exploring, Freud constructed an intricate analogy between the childhood of humanity in antiquity and the childhood memories of an individual. Just as human history is still working through the legacy of antiquity, so Freud's patients are still in the grips of their early childhood experiences. Oedipus stands metonymically both for the infancy of humanity and the infant within us all.

Freud's biography of Leonardo, as Daniel Orrells has shown, is an exemplary demonstration of the continuing role ancient mythical biographies play in the life of the later artist. Freud presents us with a Leonardo trapped between the alternative mythical typologies of Narcissus and Oedipus. As Orrells writes: 'the deluded, mythicizing self-longings of both Narcissus and Oedipus becomes exemplary for Freud's understanding of the internal myth-history of every little boy'. Leonardo's screen memory becomes the key to exploring his oscillating (sexual) identity. Moreover, the very content of Leonardo's memory is replete with mythical resonances. Freud is led directly from Leonardo's discussion of the vulture to the corpus of Egyptian mythology. Freud identifies Leonardo's vulture with the vulture-headed Egyptian goddess Mut: 'now this vulture-headed mother goddess was usually represented by

the Egyptians with a phallus; her body was female, as the breasts indicated, but it also had a male organ in a state of erection'.³¹ By equating the vulture's tale in Leonardo's anecdote simultaneously to his mother's teat and to the phallus, Freud finds a mythological parallel for Leonardo's phantasy in the phallic mother of Egyptian mythology. 'In the goddess Mut, then, we find the same combination of maternal and masculine characteristics as in Leonardo's phantasy of the vulture'.³² Both Orrells and Whitney Davis have written insightfully about the complex and paradoxical account of Leonardo's homosexuality which ensues from this identification.³³ Significantly, as Orrells shows most eloquently, it is Freud's deep immersion in ancient mythology which generates the ambivalence of his sexological diagnosis.

However, the complex relationship to his mother which Freud sees captured in the story of the vulture becomes a key not only to understanding Leonardo's adult sexuality but also more generally, and perhaps more importantly, to explaining his identity as an artist and a scientist. For at the core of Freud's study of Leonardo lies the insight that unresolved questions of sexuality are at the heart of his distinctive contributions to art and to science. It is precisely Leonardo's sublimation of his sexuality into his mental activities which is the preoccupation of Freud's text. Far from expressing his homosexuality through his choice of sexual partners, Freud sees an almost pathological repression of sexual desire: 'he appears as a man whose sexual need and activity were exceptionally reduced, as if a higher aspiration had raised him above the common animal need of mankind'.³⁴ 'He had succeeded', Freud concluded, 'in subjecting his feelings to the yoke of research'.³⁵ Freud thus pursues an analysis of Leonardo's art as the product of his sublimated sexuality:

Kindly nature has given the artist the ability to express his most secret mental impulses, which are hidden even from himself, by means of the works that he creates; and these works have a powerful effect on others who are strangers to the artist, and who are themselves unaware of the source of the emotion. Can it be that there is nothing in Leonardo's life work to bear witness to what his memory preserved as the strongest impression of his childhood?³⁶

Despite the tendency to associate psychoanalytic readings of art and literature with crude psychobiography, Freud remains circumspect about the possibility of uncovering Leonardo's repressed desires in his works of art. 'One would certainly expect there to be something', he continues:

Yet if one considers the profound transformations through which an impression in an artist's life has to pass before it is allowed to make its contribution to a work of art, one would be bound to keep any claim to certainty in one's demonstration within very modest limits; and this is especially so in Leonardo's case.³⁷

Freud's first port of call is the notoriously inscrutable smile of Mona Lisa. The puzzling smile produces both an interpretative crux and an adjective: 'Leonardesque'. Freud seems to question its association with a distinctively personal style by recalling 'the peculiar fixed smile found in archaic Greek sculptures – in those, for example, from Aegina'.³⁸ Rather than unlocking something unique about Leonardo, the enigmatic smile may speak to something more universal he suggests. Beguiled as no doubt Leonardo had been by it, Freud decides to 'leave unsolved the riddle of the expression on Mona Lisa's face'.³⁹ Rather he turns his attention to the uncanny reappearance of this mysterious facial expression in other paintings by Leonardo. In particular, he is drawn to the redoubling of the image in Leonardo's painting 'St Anne with Two Others' (Figure 13.1).

Freud is struck both by the similarity of the smiles to that of the Mona Lisa but also the loss of its unsettling inscrutability. He sees its mystery transfigured into an expression of maternal tenderness. But how is one to make sense of the reduplication of the maternal figure in this painting? Freud reviews numerous art historical interpretations that had been struck by the lack of differentiation in the ages of St Anne and her daughter the Virgin Mary. A clue to this confusion of generations, Freud believed, can be found in the specifics of Leonardo's biography:

Leonardo's childhood was remarkable in precisely the same way as this picture. He had two mothers: first his true mother Caterina, from whom he was torn away when he was between three and five, then a young and



Figure 13.1: Leonardo Da Vinci, *St. Anne with Two Others* (c.1508). Oil on wood. Louvre, Paris. Credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

tender step-mother, his father's wife, Donna Albiera. By his combining this fact about his childhood with the one mentioned above (the presence of the mother and the grandmother) and by condensing them into a composite unity, the design of 'St. Anne and Two Others' took shape for him.⁴⁰

Leonardo's two female figures, then, are the reproduction of his unorthodox familial configuration. Freud thus discovers the figure of the mother lurking behind the enigmatic smiles of both these biblical figures and their Mona Lisa archetype. But Freud goes further in associating this picture with Leonardo's biography by making a direct connection to Leonardo's childhood memory:

After we have studied this picture for some time, it suddenly dawns on us that only Leonardo could have painted it, just as only he could have created the phantasy of the vulture. The picture contains the synthesis of the history of his childhood: its details are to be explained by reference to the most personal impressions of Leonardo's life.⁴¹

Freud sees himself anticipated by Walter Pater who had already associated Mona Lisa with Leonardo's childhood dreams. Pater had seen in the Mona Lisa a 'presence ... expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire' and he further remarked on 'the unfathomable smile, always with a touch of something sinister in it, which plays over all Leonardo's work'.⁴² But Freud particularises Pater's insight by making a direct connection between Leonardo's maternal childhood fantasies and the specific fantasy of the vulture. The 'sinister' dimension that Pater had identified is for Freud specifically linked to the threat of the vulture. As an embodiment of the phallic mother, the vulture represents the overbearing nature of maternal love. Leonardo's mother's love represented at once 'the promise of unbounded tenderness' and at the same time 'sinister menace'.⁴³ 'Like all unsatisfied mothers, she took her son in place of her husband, and by too early maturing of his eroticism robbed him of a part of his masculinity.'⁴⁴ Far from a beatific solace, the smile of St Anne and the Virgin represent the threat of castration. Perhaps it is the laugh of the Medusa which is suppressed by Mona Lisa's enigmatic smile?

Despite his initial hesitations about the correspondence between biographical details and the completed work of art, in a later edition of this text Freud is emboldened by ‘a remarkable discovery’ to go even further in his analysis. One of Freud’s disciples Oskar Pfister discerned in Mary’s ‘curiously arranged and rather confusing drapery’ the outline of a vulture (Figure 13.2).

The hidden bird in the folds of Mary’s lap turns out to be an ‘unconscious picture puzzle’.⁴⁵ In Freud/Pfister’s reconstruction, the vulture’s tail rests on the small child’s shoulder gesturing provocatively towards his mouth. Freud thus sees Leonardo’s phantasy woven into the fabric of the painting. The uncanny presence of the vulture in this scene of maternal love hints at the menace which laces all motherly affection.

The unconscious intrusion of the Egyptian phallic mother onto the biblical canvass functions in a similar way to the screen memory which Leonardo recounts in his notebooks.⁴⁶ In identifying Leonardo’s childhood memory as an adult fantasy, Freud was able to subject it to the rigors of psychoanalytic analysis:

If we examine with the eyes of the psychoanalyst Leonardo’s phantasy of the vulture, it does not appear strange for long. We seem to recall having come across the same sort of thing in many places, for example in dreams; so that we may venture to translate the phantasy from its own special language into words that are generally understood.⁴⁷

Just as Freud was able to translate the ‘memory’ into the language of dream symbols, so he is able to translate Leonardo’s art into a psychoanalytic idiolect. The elaborate drapery of painterly virtuosity turns out to conceal the repressed sexual fantasy of the artist. But even in the absence of the more manifest symbol of the vulture, Leonardo’s art is able to communicate its latent preoccupations. The ‘Leonardesque’ smile becomes the site of a repetition compulsion. From Leda to John the Baptist to Bacchus, ‘the familiar smile of fascination leads one to guess that it is a secret of love. It is possible that in these figures Leonardo has denied the unhappiness of his erotic life and has triumphed over it in his art.’⁴⁸



Figure 13.2: Reworking of *St. Anne with Two Others* showing the outline of the 'vulture'. Credit: Wikimedia Commons.

To pose and answer aesthetic questions in terms of the relation of art to the artist, rather than to external nature, or to an audience, or to the internal requirements of the work itself, was the characteristic tendency of modern criticism up to a few decades ago ... This point of view is very young measured against the twenty-five-hundred-year history of the Western theory of art, for its emergence as a comprehensive approach to art, shared by a large number of critics, dates back not much more than a century and a half.⁴⁹

Writing in 1953, in the heyday of New Criticism, M.H. Abrams would argue that the desire to connect the meaning of an artwork to the artist was a direct product of Romanticism. It was the conception of the artist as a creative genius which gave way to what Abrams would call the 'expressive theory of art'. Declaring the year 1800 'a good round number' for its inauguration, Abrams characterises expressive theory in the following way: 'a work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts and feelings'.⁵⁰ Freudian psychoanalysis might on this schema emerge as the almost inevitable end-point of the Romantic preoccupation with the artist's inner world. In his analyses of art, as in so many other aspects of his work, Freud could lay claim to being the last Romantic. Freud's obsessive interest in biography seems at the very least to have perpetuated the Romantic investment in the lives of its artists. Perhaps more than this, Freudian psychoanalysis might be seen to have given the Romantic intuition a full-blown *theory*. After Freud, one could argue, it became impossible *not* to relate the artwork to the inner most workings of the artist's mind. If the 'expressive theory of art' is a marker of Romantic modernity, it is even more a characteristic of the post-Freudian twentieth century.

Yet, to explore Freud's most sustained foray into psychobiography is to be confronted at once with something more ancient and more modern. Freud's account of Leonardo finds its source in an anecdote which could have come straight out of the life of an ancient artist. As Armstrong puts it: 'Just as bees were said to have coated the infant Plato's lips with honey as a

portent of his eloquence, Leonardo's "writing so distinctly about the kite" was foretold by the feather (i.e. the quill pen) placed between his lips, the bodily locus of eloquence'.⁵¹ But as Armstrong makes clear, although Freud's story may look indistinguishable from an ancient legend, his interpretation of it moves well beyond an ancient hermeneutic. And yet, behind his unmistakably modern language of 'screen memories', 'homosexuality' and 'phallic mothers' lurks a persistent reference to the ancient world. 'Screen memories' make no sense to Freud without Livy, Leonardo's 'homosexuality' reflects a conflict between Narcissus and Oedipus, and the phallic mother can only be understood as the Goddess Mut. By turning his quintessentially twentieth-century 'pathography' into a work of mythography, Freud literalises Kriz and Kurz's claim that legend, myth and magic are the universal attributes of the image of the artist. The artist who thus emerges from Freud's account is much more mythical than any of the creations of 'expressive theory'. Leonardo may be conflicted about his sexuality but he shares less with the tortured introspective poets of the Romantic period than he does with the heroes of antiquity. Not for nothing would Freud name Leonardo 'the first man since the Greeks to probe the secrets of nature'.⁵²

Although Freud's Leonardo is steeped in antiquity, he also looks forward to the age of post-Romantic criticism which Abrams was already hailing. Psychoanalysis, in an important way, anticipates the death of the author. While psychoanalysis maintains the focus on the author, it prepares the way to identifying the 'intentional fallacy' as a fallacy. The 'discovery' of the unconscious makes the author every bit as ignorant of his/her intentions as the readers are. To Freud, it makes no difference whether the vulture concealed in Mary's robes was intentionally placed there by Leonardo. In fact, the psychoanalyst is even more interested in its presence if the artist had no intention of placing it there. And although the vulture gives us an insight into the specifics of Leonardo's biography, Freud is equally interested in its ability to elicit and reflect the fantasies of its spectators. Similarly, like a good postmodern critic, Freud's very first reaction to the story from Leonardo's

biography is to question its veracity. A true precursor to Mary Lefkowitz, Freud immediately uncovers the fictionality of this biographical anecdote. In our ability to read 'lives' as finely wrought narrative constructs we are all heirs to a specifically Freudian 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. But anticipating the work of Lefkowitz, Graziosi and others in this volume, Freud saw great value in these biographical fictions – not despite their fictionality but because of it.⁵³ It is only by recognising Leonardo's memory as a fantasy that Freud can harness it to his analysis of his art.

Freud's Leonardo exists on the threshold of antiquity and modernity. To Freud he was at once 'the first modern' and the 'last Greek'. But Freud's own methodology in his biographical sketch can also tell us something about the intersection between and ancient and modern lives. Although Freud devotes himself to understanding the enigma of Leonardo's life in all its idiosyncratic specificity, his constant references to antiquity show us that Leonardo was always more than an individual. One person's life, however exceptional that life might be, is never his or her life alone. Our lives and the narratives we tell about them are the products of culture and history not just individual psychologies. But what Freud and psychoanalysis more generally have shown is that despite the universality of certain narrative patterns, individuality still matters. This explains why the death of the author was shortly followed by his/her resurrection even if it was in a modified form. Lives provide a crucial explanatory factor for the specificity of an artist or his/her artwork. Mona Lisa's smile will always be Leonardesque even as she reminds us of the statues of Aegina. And while Leonardo's vulture may share something with Plato's bees, Plato could never have painted 'St Anne and Two Others', just as Leonardo would make an unconvincing author of the *Republic*.

Notes

- 1 Freud *Standard Edition* (SE) XI, 82.
- 2 Quoted in Freud SE XI, 82.
- 3 Kris and Kurz (1979) 1.

- 4 Freud *SE* XI, 63.
- 5 Kris and Kurz (1979) 13.
- 6 Freud *SE* XI, 82.
- 7 Freud *SE* XI, 82.
- 8 Freud *SE* XI, 82.
- 9 For the early essay see Freud *SE* III, 301–23.
- 10 *SE* VI 47–8. Although *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* was published in 1901, Freud revised this chapter substantially in 1907. Both the biographical example and his comment about the analogy to myths and legends appear in the 1907 revisions.
- 11 See Gay (1985) and my own discussions in Leonard (2008) and (2012).
- 12 Freud *SE* XI, 83.
- 13 Freud *SE* XI, 83.
- 14 See Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992). While no mention is made of Freud, Hobsbawm seems to recall him when he writes: “‘Traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented’ (1).
- 15 Freud *SE* XI, 83–4.
- 16 Freud *SE* XXIII, 68.
- 17 Armstrong (2005) 160.
- 18 Niebuhr (1828) 332.
- 19 Goldhill (2011) 176.
- 20 Freud, *SE* XX, 34–5.
- 21 Armstrong (2005) 165.
- 22 Freud *SE* XI, 84.
- 23 Freud *SE* XXII, 239.
- 24 Freud *SE* XXI, 69.
- 25 Freud *SE* XXI, 70.
- 26 Freud *SE* XXI, 70.
- 27 Freud *SE* XXI, 71.
- 28 Freud *SE* XXI, 71.
- 29 See Rudnytsky (1987); Le Rider (2002); Armstrong (2005); Bowlby (2007); Orrells (2011); and Zajko and O’Gorman (2013).
- 30 Le Rider (2002), back cover.
- 31 Freud *SE* XI, 94.
- 32 Freud *SE* XI, 94.
- 33 See Davis (1995) and Orrells (2011). Not the least of these paradoxes is the fact that Leonardo never actually talked about a ‘vulture’ – Freud seems to have been working from a German text of Leonardo’s notebooks which had mistranslated the Italian word ‘*nibio*’ which is a kite, not a vulture. See Strachey’s editorial note *SE* XI, 60–2. See also Andersen (2001).
- 34 Freud *SE* XI, 101.

- 35 Freud *SE* XI, 105.
- 36 Freud *SE* XI, 107.
- 37 Freud *SE* XI, 107.
- 38 Freud *SE* XI, 107, n. 2.
- 39 Freud *SE* XI, 109.
- 40 Freud *SE* XI, 113.
- 41 Freud *SE* XI, 112.
- 42 Pater (1873) 117–18 quoted in Freud *SE* XI, 110.
- 43 Freud *SE* XI, 115.
- 44 Freud *SE* XI, 117.
- 45 Freud *SE* XI, 115, n. 1.
- 46 Both Armstrong (2005) and Orrells (2011) 258–9 comment on the significance of Freud’s interest in Egyptian mythology in the context of the increasingly racialised discourses of mythology and religion in this period.
- 47 Freud *SE* XI, 85.
- 48 Freud *SE* XI, 118.
- 49 Abrams (1960) 3.
- 50 Abrams (1953) 22.
- 51 Armstrong (2005) 67. Similar stories were told about other artists in antiquity, including Sophocles, who was called ‘the bee’ on account of his honey-like verse. See Lefkowitz in this volume.
- 52 Freud *SE* XI, 122.
- 53 Lefkowitz (1981); (2012); Graziosi (2002).

ENVOI

JOHN HENDERSON

Yes, it could begin this way, right here, just like that . . .

George Perec, *Life | A User's Manual*.¹

Just how creative can [should?] a biographer be? When creating a life for someone creative? Lefkowitz importantly stresses just how hard [impossible] it is, and ever was, to write out getting into a position to think, imagine, produce, realize, and deliver into the public domain any piece of work – creatively. If these essays could only tell their tales . . .

To set a writing life within a persuasively formative frame must always be the approximate, suggestive, abyssal business of reading into the grain of the person that Lampe characterizes as the adynaton of biography – working always with and against the formulae, *topoi*, traditions that always shape the modes of intelligibility that style persons within the cultures involved (both parties in the deal) – but also privilege persons attributed with a special ‘gift’ with their extraordinariness, and its starring weirdness, blessedness, mystico-mythical aura and definitive otherness, including unseizably enigmatic unruliness. Elaborate stories of the trials of error, repetitive workshop grind, aching bodies, crappy tools and out of tune instruments can deploy in picturing creativity, but apprentices, factory, patronage and self-promo eventing . . . – this is unlikely to catch imaginative genius in a portrait likely to come across as itself an imagination glittering on the page.

What must count as the volume’s thrust is the aetiological task set by the creations. How come the ancient sculpture and painting fraternity managed to leave us no portraiture of themselves? Platt starkly documents both craving for authorship at work here and its frustration by the ancient abjection of

these manual hirelings. Contrast with LeVen's attuned enthusiasm for the ever-immaculate purity of the imaginary song-and-dance man Orpheus, focus and model for all bearers of the recreative and recreating powers of musical beauty and pleasure on down the line of biographeme rips and remixes (including Low's sainted Archilochus on Paros). Stick to the pride of *Litterae Humaniores*, and read authority through the performed, recounted, figured antics embodied in the classic texts and referred to their embedding authors: Uhlig's incipiently (auto)biographizing Pindaric post-Homers; Laird and his team of Virgil-orchestrators envisioning their author hidden all across the work in his works. When we acolytes meet the culture-heroes of classical studies, we mustn't fail to recognize them, prize – and purloin – the undead perpetuity of the self-disappearing reticence that their monumental works bespeak. It is possible to biographize the fiendish genius, in theory, but Archilochus is foil for Homerizing Pindar and the demonic pagan Virgil that Ermenrich must exorcise wasn't going to attract biographic canonization from him: to prove the rule, the Aunt Sally Virgil set by Propertius to close his (second) book on the unlamented possibility for a reformed elegiac mid-career change of tack, or outlaw Ovid's implied displacement of his Philistine emperor's Roman self-epitaph (*Tristia* 4.10 the antidote to RGDA) ... And (our) thanks to Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Euripides the scandal bogeyman and odd-tragedyman-out is enshrined in the originary creation of literary criticism as, exactly, not the receiver of dumb honorifics from Hanink's rogue revisionary heritage-culture secretary Lycurgus, in line with the throttled-throttling anti-imaginative production-line politesse of Low's lapidary gongs. But *he* is so enshrined – demonized – according to the all-enveloping from-work-to-author operation of 'the Chamaeleontic method' (Hanink, Lefkowitz, cf. LeVen; and see especially Graziosi). Euripides *is* a scandal, because 'he' is indelibly expressed from his plays by the intervention of reading axioms fated to provoke New Criticism and the Structuralist constellation to fetishize the work and inter Author[ial]ity. The most read and hence most prolific (because most preserved) *oeuvre* in the genre billed as

the most towering capture of uplift the library can boast ought to hole the juggernaut of classical education as guaranteed improvement below the waterline, but biographical reckonings with the tyrant-licking womanbaiting parasite Euripides never could write him down and out by writing him up. This is what his plays might well make you ‘think’. And there again, besides, make you think *on*, creatively, holed up on whatever Aegean isle: hey presto! – more Euripides grow here, too, the local rhizomes mushroom their way into lore, through science, it may be, back into his writings, into his life, then round again into the café, and the drama of this volume. Imaging the fungible thinking of a biogenetic artistry (Hanink on Ikaria).

That Malcolm X-on-as Homer must wreak revenge on Classics with Classics by appropriating him as anti-hero informer and denouncer is one thought for us philEuripideans to chew on, in amongst whole-hearted absorption of avatars we’d love to meet, be and serve up – Homer, Aeschylus, Anacreon to Theocritus, Petrarch, Quasimodo, all in it to spin it (Graziosi). But as we march our inspiriting parade of heroes past, the relay from work to creator to biographer-recreator rather unmissably means to close ranks into the hug of empathy, according to the ‘*Liebeseffekt*’ embraced by those severe giants of *Altertums-wissenschaft* off romancing away through their doorstep fantasies, from Leo through Misch to Wilamowitz and (... you know who you are) (Güthenke). Just how far out in left field or blank we’re bound to be when we try to capture the blind-nesses that must insist in our own analysis, exegesis, practice, theorization and teaching when we pronounce on, must be on display through/as the essays here, *passim*. Bookended as they stood before I buttended in, between *fin de siècle* Philologie and end of Empire Psychoanalysis, as Leonard’s clinching paper on Freud’s Leonardo recursively links back in her creative re-thinking with his strong readings of classical text-as-myth to the volume’s opening bid to bar irreverent fraudster Nietzsche from the gallery of approved models of the scholarly accounting of lived scholarship as it accounts for the inspirational creativity it hosts, shares and passes on – which is where we came in (Güthenke); and must come in (her, Leonard’s and

‘our’ parable). More than obviously, putting all your creativity cred. into animating an anti-hero has been a less than obvious strategy for a classicist. Enthusiastic honing of Caesar and Nero *as* creative lives is for once dethroned – that’s what the title, the ToC, the catchment and editors’ apotropaic intro were up to all along – and relegated to the usual stomping ground of Biography, where Alexander, Caligula, . . . Messalina . . . and Elagabalus hold court: where *uncreative* Power, its hypertrophic fictive ecstasies unleash narratives with no co-responsive bridgehead lodged there for scholar biographers to match with reflexive artistic dynamism of their own. *Qualis artifex pereo* . . . contains its own warning (for anyone who takes it on. See?).

Poetry’s meant to fill us with poetry. Philosophy’s something else. It doesn’t need to be verbally incarnated in writing. With Socrates, hero teacher of teaching, the necessary unintelligibility of unorthodoxy sets itself the paradox of archetypal creativity in thinking without the production of works to process and pass on the thought. Perish the anti-artist: he must’ve been blocked, the failed writer as failure to create. Another albatross to hang on any biographer. Enter Plato, the biographer’s biographer. Cinematographer of thought, creative dramatist of do-make-say-think. He incarnates the *Liebeseffekt*, devoted to the creation of his fictive hero as his life work, and in turn he stars as himself the blessed creative genius and ripe for extrapolation as both inspired ventriloquist-verbalizer of Socrates’ thought and inspirational autobiographer of his own ‘maturing’ body of thought (Lefkowitz). With Plato embodied in his (pseudo-)dialogues as sponsor and mythicized inculcator of doctrine, Philosophy emerges as the chief site of resistance to History, the clearing-house for political bioscript, the pre-eminent and pre-eminently *non*-creative life for charismatic heroicization of exceptional heroes. Besides its consecration in its own autarchic terms, self-invention in the Plato-Socrates dyad models the practical impact on the world of subjecting it to improvisational interrogation and construal in terms under constant re-excogitation. A thinker can abstain from public life (Lefkowitz), can even

survive as a subject for imaginative play – for writing up as an exemplar of life style as life work, without further material support for his creativity (Lampe's Aristippus), and provide a telling operator for probing and revising the way we are to understand a (any?) person's life, creative, uncreative, or otherwise; ultimately, to attest, and vindicate, the residual abyss at the core of biography, the inadequacy of any story purporting to intuit what made someone tick, what lies behind any story we tell of them (Lampe, Leonard). In narratological terms, the life of the philosopher attracts resistance to the reading off of worldly values as if given, finishing off its heroes with black humour and summing them up through their particular brand of (sardonic) full stop (Fletcher). The population of our gallery of characterful characters releases life writing to enlarge, broaden and deepen, the complexity and chemistry of available versions of creative contribution in terms of independent thinking. As Lampe shows so engagingly, Aristippus' fictive epistolographer invents a graphematic *Sitz im Leben* where the story encourages us to loosen up and explore, not judge, decide, close off, what his vibe may have been, relativized to disputation of his worth as mediated through hostility and apologetics, and through provocation to our own proclivities and set towards (un)conventionality.

With the invention of private lives proliferating through increasingly literarized educated culture comes enhanced tolerance of loose narrative weave, feeding on the fascination of wit and creative eccentricity, there opens up a challenge to writers to elude the mythic image-repertoire of charismatic inventors and performers, and an invitation to champion instead the estimation of a culture through investment in human biodiversity. My own unwritable talk for *Creative Lives* was off-limits in sneaking a major 'political-historical biographer' back onto the table, in the person of Cornelius Nepos, but this Trojan Horse imagined a story of development through Nepos' corpus in which the kinds of biog that could be written morphed as the cultures in which their champions changed, in scale and nature. As commanders became imperial mercenaries, the review presented in our editions pivots when taking stock of Hannibal,

biographed by his embedded reporter and his own autobiographer, and then Cato, multiple author and Roman-style pontificator on political characters of Rome, before catching up with Nepos' own perspective and experience outside books which projects contemporary issues, values, and constructions from the Late Republic back into the historical critique that saturation biography bombing has cumulatively cast over the classical world from Persian to Punic Wars, and their extrapolation into serial Roman assaults on the Roman Republic. This in the form of a compact and distinctively crafted finale with the unprecedented style of profiling lavished on Atticus. Here Nepos' rapport with his subject comes with their shared *Sitz im Leben*, but more particularly with their common distinctiveness for making decisive contributions to nailing down the Roman shaping of *chronography*, from pre-history through to date. The biographer imagines a life deliberately lived outside the wielding of and internecine struggles for power which turned again and again on the civilized paradoxicality of a non-partisan patriotism that ironically developed into a supportive positivity distributed without fear or favour to all sides as Rome staggered from one convulsion to another. The Roman we are here to dig turns into an ironically semi-philosophizing survivor by quitting Rome for the Hellenism he is nicknamed for; until finally all is gathered up in his creative version of a post-Socratic death-scene. As he dies mourning the Republic, and Nepos mourns the Republic with him, this brief history of time culminates in its solitary, carefully orchestrated 'significant date', where Atticus' psychopathological empathy with the ailing state leads him to a deliberate renunciation of life timed to coincide with the departure of the final envoys between the lapsed allies Octavian and Antony, after which the days of the free Republic were conclusively numbered. One self-denying death by abstention – non-violent snuffing as momentous biogram – puts him out of misery ahead. With this enshrined climax creatively displacing grand Caesarian/Imperial History's Ides of March/Battle of Actium in the 'diary' of neutral Atticus, ready for epoch-making, era-marking inscription in a resistant counter to the Julian Calendar, Nepos

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creates with innovatory, re-oriented, biography a caught, compromised but triumphantly civilized hero of pained renunciation of an unacceptable future in prospect. Short of martyrdom. Here political history posing as biography smuggles in a telling burst of creative projection through an offbeat product, and sign, of his times. And fits its own *ad hominem* personalization to a life that unaccountably makes sense of senselessness. With ease, with dignity, and a feel for decency. Give it up to the Nepos-Atticus team, but biography that dices with historiography belongs at and as the margin of Creative Lives. At The End.

Note

- 1 Perec (1987) 3.

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